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## SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF SEX OFFENDERS

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SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS  
OF SEX OFFENDERS

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

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by  
Mayra Bernal  
Henry Christopher Meza  
June 2015

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Approved by:

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## ABSTRACT

Social workers who choose to work in the field of child welfare will almost unavoidably be exposed to sexual trauma. This requires that social workers are prepared to understand and work with those who have been sexually abused, as well as the perpetrators of sex crimes. The purpose of this study was to explore social work students' perceptions of sex offenders since it is anticipated that they will work with the sex offender population at some point in their careers. Exploring this topic could help future social workers gain valuable knowledge related to recognizing barriers that may exist when working with sex offenders. To study social work students' perceptions of sex offenders, quantitative data were collected using a fifty item online survey instrument that was distributed via the Qualtrics website. In addition, t-tests, ANOVA, and Chi-square analysis were conducted using the SPSS analytical software program version 21. The findings of this study suggest that there were no significant differences between participants' gender regarding their perceptions of sex offenders. Furthermore, the study found that overall, social work students' perceptions are that there are more male sex offenders than female and juvenile sex offenders. The findings of this study suggest that further research is needed in order to explore social work practitioners' perceptions of sex offenders since there is a likelihood that social workers will work with this population at some point in their careers.

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this to my parents, Maria and Martin. Para mi mamá, gracias por apoyarme y animarme a hacer lo mejor posible. Para mi papá, gracias por recordarme que mis sacrificios valdrán la pena al final. I would also like to dedicate this to my sisters, Madeline and Sandra, and to my brother, Sergio. Madeline, thank you for staying up late with me and keeping me focused. Sandra, thank you for always being there for me and listening to me when I needed to express my frustrations. Sergio, thank you for all your wisdom, especially for knowing how to fix my computer. Finally, to my thesis partner. Thank you for being so awesome; it has truly been a pleasure working with you.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a description of the history and background on sex offenders. It explores laws, barriers, and issues and concerns pertaining to the treatment of sex offenders. An overview of specific issues regarding the views on sex offenders and the importance of the problem for social work practice at this point in time are presented in this chapter.

#### Problem Statement

Sex crimes are one of the most controversial crimes in history with publications on these crimes dating as early as the 1920's (O'Connell, Leberg & Donaldson, 1990). There are numerous types of offenses that fall into the sex crime category. These crimes include, but are not limited to indecent exposure, prostitution, rape, sexual assault, solicitations, statutory rape, child pornography, child molestation, child sexual exploitation, pimping, pedophilia, and paraphilia (Sex Crimes, 2014). Throughout history, society has lumped individuals who commit sexual acts on others (violent crimes) and individuals who have committed other sexual offenses (non-violent crimes) together into one category; this category is "sex offenders." In other words, people convicted of a sex crime, regardless of which type it is, are considered to be "sex offenders" by the perpetrator's respective state. For the purpose of this study, all of the different types of offenses mentioned earlier will be considered

and referenced as “sex crimes.” In addition, those who have committed such crimes (the sex crimes mentioned earlier) will be considered and referred to as “sex offenders” throughout this study.

Sex crimes, unfortunately, are very common in the United States. It is estimated that one in every five girls and one in every seven boys are sexually abused by the time they reach adulthood. In other words, approximately 67% of all victims of reported sex crimes are under the age of 18, and more than half of these victims are under 12. Although children are particularly more vulnerable than any other population, it is not to say that adults are not victims of sex crimes. For example, according to the National Sex Offender Public Website (NSOPW), one in six adult women and one in 33 adult men experience an attempted or completed sexual assault (What you need to know about sex offenders, 2014).

So who are sex offenders? It is estimated that 60% of perpetrators of sex crimes are known to the child but are not family members. In other words, these perpetrators can be someone like a family friend, babysitter, child care provider, or even a neighbor. Also, it is estimated that about 30% of perpetrators of child sexual abuse are family members and 10% of perpetrators are strangers to the child (What you need to know about sex offenders, 2014). Last, not all perpetrators are adults. According to the NSOPW, an estimated 23% of reported cases are perpetrated by individuals under the age of 18 (What you need to know about sex offenders, 2014).

As stated by the NSOPW, adults account for about 80% of arrests, juveniles for 20%, and males account for approximately 95% of arrests for sex crimes in the United States. In addition, it is estimated that 12 to 24% of adult sex offenders and approximate 10% of juvenile sex offenders will reoffend (What you need to know about sex offenders, 2014). In 2004, there were 255,770 rapes/ sexual assaults, in 2012, there were 346,830, and in 2013, there were 300,170 rapes/ sexual assaults in the United States (Data and Statistics, 2014). This is not to say that all of these crimes were reported to the police. As reported by the USA.gov website, 29.3% of rape/sexual assaults were reported to the police in 2004, in 2012, 28.2% of rapes/ sexual assaults were reported, and in 2013, 34.8% of crimes were reported to the police (Data and Statistics, 2014). In addition, in 2004, 0.7 victimizations per 1,000 persons age 12 and older were not reported to the police. In 2012, 0.9 and in 2013, 0.7 victimizations were not reported to police (Data and Statistics, 2014). The reason for underreporting is that, oftentimes, victims of sex crimes are afraid that their abuser will harm them again if they report them to the authorities. Not only are they afraid, but sometimes, victims are worried that they will be blamed for what happened, as well as they feel guilty, ashamed, and/or embarrassed that such crime has happened to them, which is why they fail to report.

The majority of sex offenders reside in communities, therefore, sex offender laws, supervision, and proper treatment were set in place in an effort

to protect communities and to help sex offenders not reoffend. Prior to 1994, few states required convicted sex offenders to provide their location in the community to public and local law enforcement. Due to the belief that there was an increase in sex crimes and panic among the public, Congress passed the Jacob Wetterling Act in 1994, which required all states to register sex offenders. Later, in 1996, due to the tragic rape and murder of seven year-old Megan Kanka by a released sex offender living in her neighborhood, Megan's Law was enacted (Fitzke, 2009, p. 21). Megan's Law requires all sex offenders to register their address of residence, on release from incarceration or other institutions, to state and federal sex offender registries. This law also requires sex offenders to notify local law enforcement whenever they relocate (Angeles & Zuniga, 2012, p. 2).

Other sex offender laws include the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006 and Jessica's Law, also known as Proposition 83. According to McPherson (2007), under the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006, a person who is charged and convicted for indecent exposure such as streaking, skinny dipping, or urinating in public are required to register as a sex offender for up to 15 years. Jessica's Law, which was passed by the State of California in 2006, prohibits registered sex offenders from living within 2,000 feet on any area in which children come together such as schools or parks (Angeles & Zuniga, 2012, p. 3).

Research indicates that the term “sex offender” tends to bring about strong emotions. Simply hearing the term makes people uncomfortable and unwilling to talk about the subject due to their own personal beliefs about sex offenders. Attitudes towards sex offenders, specifically negative attitudes, can be a problem because, attitudes can influence personal reactions, policies, and legislative decision making (Church, Wakeman, Miller, Clements, & Sun, 2008). These attitudes can also influence the type and quality of treatment sex offenders receive. For example, Ward and Connolly (2006) argued that personal attitudes towards sex offenders can have an impact on social service delivery, and more specifically, the nature and quality of services provided. In addition, research by Ward and Connolly supports that personal attitudes towards sex offenders have a great impact on service delivery. That is, personal biases can influence the way professionals react to and/or treat their clients, more specifically, sex offenders. Also, Ward and Connolly concluded that assessment of professionals’ general attitudes is important and necessary for the success of therapeutic interventions, since attitudes are likely to influence treatment.

According to Ackerman and Furman (2012), “social work practice with sexual offenders is not new; in fact, sex offender programs have been an important training ground for graduate social work students in family therapy” (p. 591). Although social work practice with sex offenders has been around for many years, social work has had a hesitant relationship with the provision of

treatment for sex offenders. The reason for this is that social work is viewed more as a profession that advocates for victims' rights rather than with meeting the needs of sex offenders (Ackerman & Furman, 2012). Today, social work, as a profession, provides values and interventions that can effectively meet the treatment needs of convicted sex offenders. Social workers have had to learn how to build effective working relationships with every client on their case load, regardless of their situation. In other words, social workers have had to learn how to provide adequate treatment to sex offenders by building a non-judgmental relationship with the client. According to Ackerman and Furman (2012), it is important that social workers maintain their professionalism when treating sex offenders in order to work with facts and avoid bias and prejudice. Therefore, it is important to explore social work students' perception on sex offenders in order to attempt to understand their views towards sex offenders.

### Purpose of the Study

Social workers who choose to work in the field of child welfare will almost unavoidably be exposed to sexual trauma. This requires that social workers are prepared to understand and work with those who have been sexually abused, as well as, the perpetrators of sex crimes. The purpose of this research study was to explore social work students' perceptions of sex offenders since it is anticipated that they will work with the sex offender population at some point in their careers.

Few social work students will be adequately prepared to take on this challenging work without specific post-graduate training. This is a problem because there is no standard that exists for the inclusion of sex crime and/or sex offender content in school curricula. Grady and Abramson (2011) argued that, “social work curricula should include content on working with sexual offenders given the increasing prospect that new practitioners, whatever their practice setting, will be called on to work with sexual offenders, offenders’ families, or the survivors of sexual offenses” (p. 441). Furthermore, because no standard exists for including sex offender content in social work curriculum, specifically at California State University, San Bernardino, each new generation of social work students may bring about their own myths about sex offenders, essentially, finding they are unprepared to address the needs of this population. Not only will social work students bring forth their own myths about sex offenders, but they will also tend to transfer their own biases and beliefs onto others. According to Myers (2008), social workers’ emotions and feelings towards sex offenders can affect their judgment when it comes to the rational decision-making process. These emotions can also obscure social workers’ rationality of their knowledge and feelings in the way they apply this knowledge to the treatment of sex offenders. For example, Myers (2008) argued:

It is important to know yourself (values/feelings/emotional responses) in order to tame these influences on the rational. This rational approach

will be familiar within social work education when students make claims to wish to be 'non-judgmental' in their practice, a paradox when the social work business is about making judgment and the term illustrates the powerful image of an objective professional role. (p. 205)

Therefore, it is essential that social work students obtain adequate knowledge on sex offenders because it will help students know themselves and better prepare them to work with that population. Also, being armed with this baseline knowledge and training, social workers have the potential to be part of the wider effort to reduce the rates of sex crimes by understanding and effectively treating the individuals who commit these crimes and not only those who are survivors.

Research has pointed out that social workers will work with sex offenders at some point in their careers. Research has also pointed out that service providers' perceptions of sex offenders have an impact on the treatment they provide to this population. For example, Ward and Connolly (2006) conducted a study in New Zealand that examined social workers' attributions for sexual offending against children. They used grounded theory and a set of eight categories derived from the data collected to compare the types of explanations given by social workers and social work students on what they believed were the reasons for sexual offenses. Ward and Connolly argued that in recent years, there has been limited amount of research done on the attitudes of mental health workers towards sex crimes and sex

offenders. They argued that clinicians and researchers have found that the negative attitudes and vague thoughts impact treatment of sex offenders. In other words, the attitudes professionals have towards sex offenders have an impact on social service delivery, and in particular, the nature and quality of services provided. Ward and Connolly's (2006) research found that assessment of the professional's general attitude is necessary for the success of therapeutic interventions since attitudes are likely to influence the client's response to change.

Thus, studying social work students' perceptions of sex offenders was needed because personal attitudes are likely to influence treatment, resulting in the needs of sex offenders to be ignored. To study social work students' perception of sex offenders, quantitative data were collected using a fifty item survey instrument. In addition, t-tests, ANOVA, and Chi-square analysis were conducted via the SPSS analytical software program.

### Significance of the Project for Social Work

Social workers have an ethical responsibility to advocate and provide services to others beyond their self-interest; furthermore, social workers should not practice, condone, or facilitate services with any form of discrimination (NASW Code of Ethics, 2014). This study may contribute to social work practice by helping future social workers gain valuable knowledge related to recognizing barriers that may exist when working with sex offenders. Sex offenders may possibly be considered a vulnerable and

oppressed population due to the impact created by services that are biased and restricting social policies, which limits these individuals' successful reintegration into society. Adequate social services are necessary because they help increase the quality of life and opportunities; not only for sex offenders, but for all the populations they serve. Social workers are helping professionals that provide a number of services including mental health, child welfare services, and other social services. In addition, social workers are required to advocate for human rights and social justice in order to ensure that each individual has their basic human rights, as well as adequate standard of living, health care, and education (Hepworth, Ronney, Ronny & Gottfried, 2013).

The Generalist Intervention Model (GIM) "is a practice model providing step-by-step direction concerning how to undertake the planned change process, which is generally directed at addressing problems" (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2010, p. 32). In other words, the GIM is a practice model that provides specific steps for the social worker to follow in order to engage the client, assess problems and strengths, and establish a plan of action, implement that plan, evaluate it, terminate it, and follow up to observe the client's continuing position.

With that said, the GIM has three major features. The first is that GIM assumes that all social workers acquire an eclectic knowledge base, a wide range of skills, and a professional values base. The second is the GIM's

approach where almost every problem may be analyzed and addressed through the multiple levels of intervention, micro, mezzo, and macro. The final major feature of the GIM is its core seven-step planned change process that focuses on the assessment and use of the client's strengths. This seven-step planned change process involves: engagement, assessment, planning, implementation, evaluation, termination, and follow-up. Taking into consideration the different stages of the GIM, this study could impact the treatment sex offenders need and receive.

Implementation, which is the fourth step of the GIM, is the action phase of the GIM; here social workers implement adequate interventions that were established during the planning phase of the model. Using and understating the implementation stage of the GIM, this study could impact how sex offenders are treated in regards to the perceptions future social workers hold. In other words, the treatment sex offenders receive from social workers may be affected by the perceptions social workers have of sex offenders. For example, social workers who have better attitudes towards sex offenders tend to be more efficient in the treatment of sex offenders. In contrast, social workers who have detrimental or negative attitudes towards sex offenders tend to communicate said attitudes to their clients, thereby impeding sex offenders' therapeutic progress (Ward and Connolly, 2006).

This study is relevant to child welfare practice in the way that social workers in this specialization work with sex offenders. As previously

mentioned, social workers who choose to work in the field of child welfare will unavoidably be exposed to sexual trauma. Due to this reason, social workers in this setting have an obligation to work with the victims of sex crimes as well as the perpetrators. Working with this population may come in the form of working with parents who have committed a sex crime on their child/ children; it may also come in the form of providing treatment to juveniles who have committed a sex crime. According to NSOPW, juveniles account for approximately 23% of sexual offenses committed against other minors (What you need to know about sex offenders, 2014). If an adolescent or child commits an illegal sex act on another minor, then there is a likelihood that a child welfare worker will be involve in the treatment process for that juvenile. It is the job of the child welfare worker to encourage these individuals to reach their potential and become functioning citizens on reintegration to society. Furthermore, it is essential that child welfare workers implement services and treatment to their clients, regardless of who they are or what crimes they have committed.

Considering the likelihood that social work students will work with sex offenders, it is essential that social work students become familiar with their biases towards sex offenders. For that reason, the following questions were asked: What are social work students' perceptions towards sex offenders? Do social work students perceive themselves as ready to work with sex

offenders? Are social work students receiving enough training to work with sex offenders?

It was hypothesized that students in the School of Social Work program have negative attitudes towards the sex offender population. In addition, it was hypothesized that social work students are not prepared to work with this population.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

Not much research has been conducted on social work students' perceptions of sex offenders. However, there is research on the attitudes professionals have towards sex offenders. In order to better understand this intricate subject, this section is broken into nine sections where 14 peer-reviewed studies are reviewed that are pertinent to studying social work students' perceptions of sex offenders. These nine sections are: definitions of terms, taboos of sex offenders, sex offender myths, the media and how it's portrayed, perceptions in America, perceptions among professionals, perceptions among college students, perception among social work students, and theories guiding conceptualization. This is important because it is widely known in the literature that professionals' biases can negatively affect the services and/or treatment that are provided to sex offenders.

#### Definitions of Terms

The following definitions are the terms that are used throughout this study.

**Sex Offender** - A person who commits a crime involving sexual acts.

**Sex Crime** - A crime that involves sexual assault, other sexual acts, or having a sexual motive. They are illegal crimes involving coerced sexual conduct against another individual (Sex Crimes, 2014).

**Indecent Exposure** - The act purposefully displaying one's genitals in public, causing others to be alarmed or offended (Sex Crimes, 2014).

**Prostitution** – The practice or occupation of offering or engaging in sexual acts with someone for payment (Sex Crimes, 2014).

**Rape** - “This refers to non-consensual sexual intercourse that is committed by physical force, threat or injury, or other duress” (Sex Crimes, 2014).

**Sexual Assault** - “Refers to any crime in which the offender subjects the victim to sexual touching that is unwanted and offensive” (Sex Crimes, 2014).

**Solicitation** - “The act of requesting, encouraging, or demanding someone to engage in criminal conduct, with the intent to facilitate or contribute to the commission of the crime” (Sex Crimes, 2014).

**Statutory Rape** - Refers to sexual relations involving a minor below the legal age of consent.

**Pedophilia** - Refers to sexual feelings directed towards children.

**Paraphilia** - Any sexual interest greater than or equal to normophilic sexual interest; and any person who has intense and recurrent sexual urges or fantasies towards children (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

**Treatment** - Holistic approaches including social services, mental health, and resources needed.

**Recidivism** - An individual who is reconvicted of a sexual crime.

**Reintegration** - To reenter again or to integrate again into a group, society, community, or other entity.

### Taboos of Sex Offenders

Research suggests that incest and other forms of sexual abuse against children began to become public in the 1970s and 1980s when researchers, child advocates, and clinicians began to challenge sexual abuse taboos (Peter, 2009, p. 1111). During that time, sexual abuse was considered and thought of as acts of pedophiles and sexual sadists; society never imagined that incest was something that was going on at that time. According to Peter (2009), researchers tended to focus mainly on child abuse and spousal assault within the context of male perpetrators and female victims. Never did the thought of a female perpetrator existing in society cross the minds of people during those times. Eventually, when a female sex offender came about, it was often viewed as an extremely rare occurrence.

An illustration of this perceived rarity was presented in Peter's (2009) study. This illustration focused on an incident where a mother was sexually molesting her five-year-old daughter. This illustration argued that, mother-daughter sexual abuse was nearly nonexistent and that it was estimated that mother-daughter sexual abuse was one in a million, if not less (Peter, 2009, p. 1112). Unfortunately, reality is that women do in fact commit sexual crimes on

children, whether these children are theirs or not. According to Peter's (2009) study,

Female sex offenders range between 1% and 20%. In terms of official statistics, the Canadian Commission on Sexual Offenses against Children and Youth (1984) found that 1.2% of suspected sex abusers were female. Ten years later, data collected from the Winnipeg Family Violence Court between 1992 and 1997 revealed that 3% of child sexual predators were female. This data was consistent to sources from the United States, where data collected from New Hampshire and Vermont found that 2% of convicted child molesters were female. (p. 1112)

This study proved that female sex offenders are not just a taboo, but that they do exist in our society. Further, this study found that in Canada, the United States, and Britain, approximately one in ten sex crimes are committed by female sex offenders.

According to Elliott (1997), around the 1970s and 1980s, a female sexually abusing a child was the ultimate taboo, especially since the first case of sexual abuse was presented in 1968 and it was a male perpetrator. At that time, professionals, along with society, was just finding out about the existence of sex crimes, so the idea of a female perpetrator was out of the question. Research indicated that a majority of victims of sexual abuse were girls who were abused by their fathers, not their mothers. Due to this research, the idea

of female sex offenders began to be more of a taboo. Society began to believe that women were not capable of committing sex crimes because they were not supposed to be sexually aggressive and that male power theory relinquished women as possible abusers (Elliott, 1997).

Today, juvenile sex offenders, in particular female juvenile sex offenders tend to be viewed as taboos. Even though time has passed, it is still difficult for society to grasp that adult males are not the only individuals committing sexual crimes. For example, an estimated 23% of reported cases are perpetrated by individuals under the age of 18, and of those reported juvenile offenders, 95% are males (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014).

According to Vick, McRoy, and Matthews (2002), literature on female sex offenders 18 years old and younger and adult female sex offenders is limited. Vick et al. (2002) argued that factors contributing to limited amount of research on this population are due to disagreement about the definition of crimes by females, social perceptions about behaviors of juvenile females, potential denial about the crimes, and the fact that young female sex offenders are unusual (p. 2). Furthermore, Vick et al. (2002) argued that literature on sex offenders has primarily focused on males, which is a problem because sexual double standards are put into place, resulting in societies' belief about young women further complicate the issue.

## Sex Offender Myths

Sex crimes against children tend to evoke a sense of alarm and urgency among the public. Not only does this type of crime create panic among the public, but it also encourages people to create distorted views and myths of sex offenders. For example, McGee, O'Higgins, Garavan, and Conroy (2011) conducted a study where they aimed to get a view of how the general public views rape and sexual abuse. It also sought to assess the frequency of myths concerning rape and sexual abuse. This study was conducted in Ireland where 1,560 participants, 18 years of age and older, were interviewed using a national cluster-randomized telephone interview method. This study found that men are more likely to endorse rape myths than women. Also, the study found that older participants tended to endorse rape myths more than those who are younger.

One common sex offender myth is sexual compulsion. According to Galeste, Fradella, and Vogel (2012), the idea of sexual compulsion is that sex offender recidivism rates are unusually high, yet research states otherwise. For example, it is estimated that 12 to 24% of adult sex offenders and approximate 10% of juvenile sex offenders will reoffend (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014). Hanson, Harris, Helmus, and Thornton (2014) conducted a study that focused on the length of time that individuals did not reoffend. In other words, the purpose of this study was to examine the effect of time offense-free in the community on the recidivism of sex offenders. This study

was conducted using an aggregate sample of 7,740 sex offenders drawn from 21 different samples. Hanson et al.'s (2014) study found that sex offenders' risk of serious sexual crime decreases the longer they remain sex offense-free in the community, therefore, disproving the myth of sexual compulsion.

Another common sex offender myth is that sexual abuse is generally perpetrated by a stranger. According to McGee et al. (2011), research into rape and sexual assaults has shown that the perpetrator is more than likely somebody known to the victim than a stranger (3581). As mentioned before, it is estimated that 60% of perpetrators of sex crimes are known to the child but are not family members. That is, these perpetrators can be someone like a family friend, babysitter, child care provider, or even a neighbor. Also, it is estimated that about 30% of perpetrators of child sexual abusers are family members and 10% of perpetrators are strangers to the child (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014).

Sex offender myths are prejudicial and stereotyped beliefs about sex crimes which carry on in society. They may have a great impact on those affected by sex crimes as well as on those who committed such crimes. And although sex offender myths may change over time and vary between cultures, sex offender myths are always presented to the public by the media.

#### The Media and how it is Portrayed

Sex crimes are the most controversial of all crimes. There are numerous publications in the media related to sexual abuse and sexual

crimes. For example, Galest et al. (2012) argued that the media exaggerates cases involving the abduction and sexual victimization of a child, especially those cases that involve the tragic death of the child. In addition, the way sex offenders are portrayed in the media can sometimes result in the development of certain myths that are contrary to the data supported by research. Galest et al. (2012) also argued that the media presents the public with a distorted view of sex offending, which results in molding the public's attitudes towards sex offenders (p. 5). Not only does the media present the public with an increasingly distorted view of sex offending that shapes the attitudes of the public, but the media also influences social policies. These misrepresentations create a fear among the public, which results in law makers creating and passing a variety of social policies that protect community members. Furthermore, the media plays an important role in the way the public views the criminal justice system since the majority of public knowledge about crime and justice is derived from the media (Galest et al., 2012).

The media develops myths about sex offenders that affect public perceptions on sex offenders, which in turn, results in the influence of public policy. According to Galest's et al. (2012) study, the media portrays sex offenders in a distorted way; these distortions then result in law makers developing new policies that place strict implications on sex offenders. In other words, these portrayals placed by the media cause great fear among society, as well as policy makers; therefore, as an attempt to increase the

safety of the community, law makers enact restricting laws that keep sex offenders from successfully reintegrating into society. Some of these laws include sex offender registry and notification laws. For example, according to Galest et al. (2012), "California was the first state to apply registration laws strictly for sex offenders in 1947" (p. 6). This law was put into place in order to require that all sex offenders keep certain information, such as address, telephone number, etc., up to date with the local police department. Other states went beyond registration laws by enacting notification laws designed to inform the community about the whereabouts of sex offenders. These laws were put in place as an effort to protect children from sexual abuse and to report certain risky behaviors that may lead to new sexual offenses.

#### Perceptions in America

According to Frei (2008), sexual offending is a devastating crime that is currently capturing worldwide attention. Also, the scope and nature of sexual offending, as well as community responses to sex offenders, have received extensive legal and psychological attention. For example, in America, when the public is presented with a case where a female sex offender perpetrated on a male victim, the public associates the female sex offender as an emotionally fragile person who made a mistake with an underage partner. On the other hand, male victims are viewed by the public as willing participants. "The obvious gender bias within sexual offenses, public perceptions and reactions to such crimes, and judicial processing of these crimes create

substantial questions regarding the accuracy of these depictions and possible policy implications” (Frei, 2008). Not only does a gender bias create questions regarding possible policy implication, but it also creates a lack of serious national attention to the issue, which could result in the lack of services for female sex offenders, and essentially, placing potential child victims at great risk.

In America, perceptions of sex offenders normally tend to focus around the myths media enforces on them. In other words, due to the influential misconceptions on sex offenders placed by the media, many Americans tend to be misinformed about sex offenders. For example, many American believe that perpetrators of child sexual abuse are strangers. This, as it has been discussed before, is not true. Oftentimes, the perpetrators of child sexual abuse tend to be someone the child already knows; rarely is it a complete stranger. Further, many Americans tend to believe that the nature of victim characteristics are that males are the ones who perpetrate and that males are rarely the victims of sex crimes. Church et al. (2008) found that there are considerable inconsistencies between common perceptions and factual information about sex offenders. That is, public views of sex offenders tend to be inconstant with factual information about sex offenders.

#### Perceptions among Professionals

In comparison to the views of the general public, professionals tend to have positive perceptions towards sex offenders. For example, Sanghara and

Wilson (2006) carried out a study where they surveyed 60 specialists involved with sex offenders and 71 school teachers. Three questionnaires were distributed and a mediation analysis was performed on the relationship between the scores. Overall, this study demonstrated that experienced professionals exhibit less negative stereotypes, they have more positive attitudes toward sex offenders, and they express more knowledge of child abuse than inexperienced professionals. This study also demonstrated that attitudes towards sexual offenders were significantly intervened by the effect of knowledge of child abuse. Further, this study concluded that the less knowledge an individual has about child abuse, the more stereotypes they may have about sexual offenders.

Looking at the perceptions professionals have of sex offenders is important when it comes to the treatment of said population. Research suggests that personal views on sex offenders do impact the type of treatment sex offenders will receive. In addition, research has supported that personal beliefs impact the implication of new policies set in place for sex offenders. For example, sex offender laws are created and set in place to promote community safety. However, there are some people who feel these laws are too restricting.

Day, Carson, Newton, and Hobbs (2014) conducted a study aimed at examining how professionals who work with sex offenders view policies designed to enhance public safety. This study was conducted in Western

Australia where professionals were asked to participate on the basis of their know involvement with assessing and treating sex offenders. This study was conducted using a sample of 22 professionals (seven participants were psychologists, 12 were staff from nongovernment agencies, and three were community corrections officers). As a result of this study, it was concluded that many professionals believed current laws are both over-inclusive and place unfair restrictions on some offenders. In other words, many professionals felt that these laws restrict sex offenders from many things, they make it harder for sex offenders to rehabilitate, and it takes away their human rights. In addition, many professionals felt laws are unfair and that they place too many restrictions on sex offenders, which results in sex offenders not being able to obtain jobs or successfully reintegrate into society.

#### Perceptions among College Students

McGee et al. (2011) argued that rape myths are more likely to be generated by men than by women. Furthermore, they argued that the role of the media tends to endorse rape myths, influences the public, and influences policy making. McGee et al. (2011) illustrated a study that looked at the effects of headlines where rape myths were pushed onto U.S. university students. This study found that men appeared to be influenced more by these myths than college women. In addition, these college men were less likely to consider the perpetrator portrayed in the media to be guilty. Last, this study

found that college women who watched television were more likely to believe that rape accusations were false (McGee et al. (2011).

Church et al. (2008) conducted a study in Alabama where they investigated the nature of attitudes towards sex offenders. The purpose of the study was to develop an attitude assessment tool that addresses specific areas found in literature. The researchers felt it was necessary to develop this tool because they believed that the term “sex offender” was likely to bring about strong emotions. With this idea in mind, the researchers felt that there was very limited empirical knowledge about the public perceptions of sex offenders. The methods used for this study were (1) initial development and data reduction and (2) preliminary confirmatory analysis and final data reduction.

In order to conduct their research, they utilized a sample consisting of 347 undergraduate students enrolled in several Introduction to Psychology classes at a major southern university, ranging from 17 to 47 years of age. From this method, the Community Attitudes Toward Sex Offenders (CATSO) scale was developed. Church et al.’s (2008) study found that replication and extension to other populations appears to be necessary. In other words, they believed that replication of their study and exploration of other populations is important in order to gain more knowledge on how attitudes are shaped and how attitudes can influence personal reactions, policies, and legislative

decision making. In conclusion, more research is needed on college students' perceptions of sex offenders, and more specifically, on social work students.

### Perceptions among Social Work Students

Ward and Connolly (2006) conducted a study in New Zealand where they examined social workers' attributions for sexual offending against children. Ward and Connolly (2006) used grounded theory and a set of eight categories derived from the data collected to compare the types of reasons given by social workers and social work students on reasons for sexual offenses. This study concluded that social work students made far more attributions than social workers, with females tending to be more likely to give an answer than males.

Ward and Connolly (2006) argued that in recent years, there has been a limited amount of research into the attitudes of mental health workers towards sexual offending. They also argued that clinicians and researchers have found that the negative attitudes and vague thoughts impact facilitation of sex offenders. In other words, the attitudes professionals have towards sex offenders have an impact on social service delivery, and particularly, the nature and quality of services provided. Ward and Connolly (2006) concluded that assessment of the professional's general attitude is necessary for the success of therapeutic interventions since attitudes are likely to influence the client's response to change.

## Theories Guiding Conceptualization

### Trauma-Informed Care (TIC)

In order to help guide the study, looking at theoretical framework is an important aspect in the research process. For example, according to Levenson (2014), social work practitioners should consider incorporating principles of Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) into evidence-based sex offender treatment models. This is important because it can provide a way to help sex offenders build coping skills and interpersonal skills that will inhibit further abusive behaviors. Further, appropriate approaches to therapy can enhance clients' interpersonal skills, as well as, improve their general well-being. This type of personal growth would be expected to lessen future acts of sexual abuse towards children as sex offenders adopt, as well as practice, non-destructive strategies for meeting emotional needs (Levenson, 2014). It is important to implement this theory in the study in order to gain an understanding of how to better serve sex offenders. That is, this theory can help guide the study in the way that it offers an outlook on the skills sex offenders need, as well as, give social work students an idea of how to serve this population. Furthermore, this theory presents a perspective of the knowledge social work students should have in order to work with sex offenders in a way that will increase their success.

### Conflict Theory

Conflict Theory draws attention to conflict, dominance, and oppression in social life (Hardina, 2002). In other words, Conflict Theory focuses on the groups' and individuals' attempt to advance their own interests over the interest of others. For example, power is unequally divided and some social groups dominate others. Further, social order is based on the manipulation and control of non-dominant groups by dominant groups. This theory can be utilized to understand clients, specifically sex offenders, who are experiencing oppression in some form or another within their communities and society in general. Not only can this theory be used to understand clients, but, it can also be use to understand how social workers are providing services to their clients. For instance, using this theory provides an outlook on whether social work professionals and paraprofessionals are misusing their power when working with sex offenders due to their individual perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs.

### Interpersonal Relations Theory

Hildegard Peplau developed Interpersonal Relations Theory in 1952. According to Senn (2013), Peplau's theory focuses on the interpersonal processes and therapeutic relationships that develop between the nurse and patient. In addition, this theory focused on psychological and interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, Peplau believed that, "through the devise of the

therapeutic nurse-patient relationship, the nurse could be most beneficial to human beings” (Senn, 2013, p. 32).

Peplau argued that the goal of this theory is to produce desirable goals that benefit the patient (Senn, 2013, p. 32). In other words, interpersonal process is the process where nurses and patients learn to work together and resolve issues. Here, the nurse uses interpersonal relationships to assess the patient’s psychological and emotional needs with learned communication skills, personal strengths, and an understanding of human behavior.

Although Interpersonal Relations Theory focuses on the relationship between nurses and patient, it can also be applicable to the field of social work. For example, Peplau argued that it is important for nurses to understand their own behaviors and accept clients unconditionally. Like nurses, social workers need to understand their own biases pertaining to clients’ behaviors and provide these clients with services regardless of the circumstances that the clients are in. In other words, social workers have an ethical responsibility to start where the clients is and provide him/her with the necessary services they need to be successful, regardless of the individuals’ situation.

Interpersonal Relations Theory can be very effective in sex offender treatment given that perceptions towards sex offenders can influence their treatment. For example, Peplau argued that it is important to develop a good working relationship between service provider and client in order to work

together and resolve issues. This is important because social workers need to develop a genuine working relationship with their clients in order to help them with their concerns and treatment process. In addition, developing an effective working relationship can result in helping sex offenders modify their negative behaviors, increase self-esteem, develop tools necessary to reduce risk, and help sex offenders reintegrate into society.

### Summary

Based on the literature review, perceptions of sex offenders can negatively affect the services and/or treatment that are provided to sex offenders. Further research is needed to better understand the perceptions social work students have on sex offenders. The guiding theories of this study include Trauma-Informed Care (TIC), Conflict Theory, and Interpersonal Relations Theory.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

This chapter provides a clear overview of the research design, sample, and techniques used to collect data for this research study. A quantitative study approach was used in order to gather information regarding social work students' perception of sex offenders. A survey questionnaire was developed for this study.

#### Study Design

The purpose of this research study was to explore social work students' perceptions of sex offenders since it is anticipated that they will work with this population at some point in their careers. The research design that worked best to address the issue of social work students' perceptions of sex offenders was the quantitative method. Using a quantitative approach worked best due to its high degree of control and authority over the research design, data collection method, and other essential components of the research process. Also, because there is limited amount of information on this research topic, an exploratory approach was applied to further understand the perceptions of sex offenders among social work students. Limitations for this study included the complexity of getting support from other social work schools which allowed

access for male and female social work students to participate in this research study and complete a survey questionnaire.

In order for this research study to go forth, the following questions need to be asked: What are social work students' perceptions towards sex offenders? Do social work students perceive themselves as ready to work with sex offenders? Are social work students receiving enough training to work with sex offenders?

It was hypothesized that students in the Social Work programs have negative attitudes towards the sex offender population. In addition, it was hypothesized that social work students are not prepared to work with this population.

### Sampling

Data were obtained by sampling social work students at various social work programs in the Inland Empire, a metropolitan area and region of Southern California. Participants for this study consisted of all social work students attending California State University, San Bernardino, La Sierra University, and Loma Linda University. The criteria for this selection included Bachelors, Masters, full-time, part-time, and Pathway Distance Education program (online) students. A sample size of about 200 students was used to conduct this research. It was determined that this was a reasonable sample size to conduct the analysis for this research study due the number of students in each program. Students who were enrolled in one of the three school of

social work programs completed a 50 question survey via the Qualtrics website (<http://www.qualtrics.com>).

The type of sampling that was best suited for this research study was non-probability sampling, more specifically, availability sampling (convenience sampling). This approach allowed for better recruitment of participants in order to have enough of participants for this study. According to Grinnell and Unrau (2010), “availability sampling is often appropriate in social work research when researcher is exploring a new setting and is trying to get some sense of prevailing attitudes” (p. 234). This type of sampling was appropriate since the purpose of this study was to explore social work students’ perceptions of sex offenders.

#### Data Collection and Instruments

Several of the questions for this survey instrument were adapted using questions from Jessica Duncan’s graduate thesis, “Public Perceptions Regarding Sex Offenders and Sex Offender Management” (2012). In addition, questions about children, adolescent, and female sex offenders were added to the survey instrument.

Data were collected by a self-administered online survey questionnaire via the Qualtrics website (<http://www.qualtrics.com>). This questionnaire included questions examining participations’ knowledge of sex offenders, sex offenses, and their perception of sex offenders male, female and juvenile. This survey consisted of seven demographic questions and forty-three short

closed-ended questions (Appendix A). This survey was broken up into four sections: demographics, two sections of perceptions of sex offenders, and knowledge of sex offenders.

This first portion of the survey asked participants to identify their personal demographics: gender, race, parenthood, and current level of education. Gender and race was measured categorically where participations marked the appropriate box most fitting. Age was measured at an interval level where participants were asked to indicate their age. Parenthood was measured at a nominal level where participants were asked if they have children. Finally, the level of current education was measured at a nominal level, where participants were asked if they are students in the Bachelor or Master program.

In the second portion of this survey, participants were asked 23 questions regarding their beliefs and perceptions of sex offenders based on a ratio scale. This portion of the survey asked participants to type an answer (percent) they felt was most correct on a scale between 0 to 100 percent. For example, participants were asked, “what percent of sex offenders are children under the age of 18?”

In the third portion of this survey, participants were asked 12 questions about their knowledge of sex offenders. In this section, participants were required to select an answer they feel was either true or false. For example,

“do female sex offenders reoffend at a higher rate than juvenile sex offenders?”

In the final portion of this survey, four statements were given to determine participants' perceptions of the sex offender population. These statements were rated on a Likert scale where answers ranged from strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. The independent variable for this study was the demographics of social work students participating in this study and the dependent variable is perceptions of sex offenders.

The survey was distributed via an online survey software website. The benefit of using an online survey was that participants were able to take the survey using any electronic device that has access to the internet at their convenience. One limitation of using an online survey came in the form of technical difficulties, which could have interrupted participants from completing the survey.

### Procedures

A script was drafted to contact directors or chairs of each target school of social work program at California State University, San Bernardino, La Serra University, and Loma Linda University via email. The email briefly described the purpose of the study, presented a clear assurance that students' confidentiality was protected, and requested that the survey instrument be distributed to their students by email. When approval from each school of

social work was granted, the survey instrument was disbursed via email. The email that was sent out to social work students contained a hyperlink which directed participants to the Qualtrics website where they were able to complete the survey (Appendix D). Before beginning the survey, each participant was provided with a brief introduction on the purpose of the study and an informed consent form where they were required to check a box that indicated they agreed and understood to the terms of the informed consent. This survey took social work students 20 minutes to complete, and each student had approximately one month to complete the survey. In addition, participants were free to take the survey in any atmosphere they pleased.

#### Protection of Human Subjects

In order to protect the anonymity of participants, no personal identifying information was collected. An informed consent form was provided to all participants stating the purpose of the study and informing participants that their participation is voluntary and they can withdraw from participating at any time (Appendix B). Prior to taking part in the study, participants were required to check a box declaring they gave their consent to participate. Once participants completed the survey, they were provided with a debriefing statement (Appendix C). In the debriefing statement, participants were informed of who to contact if they were interested in the results of the study and if they had any questions or concerns regarding the study.

Data were collected and exported into the SPSS analytical software program version 21 once all participants' responses were completed. Data collected from the surveys were saved on a flash drive and locked in a password protective safe until the study was completed. Once the study was completed, data were erased and the flash drive was reformatted, ensuring participants' confidentiality never being compromised.

### Data Analysis

For the purpose of this study, a quantitative method was utilized in order to assess students' perceptions of sex offenders. Multiple t-tests were conducted in order to determine the following: whether attitudes of social work students differed by gender; whether having children impacts attitudes of social work students towards sex offenders; and whether attitudes differed between social work programs. t-tests were also conducted to determine if there were differences in attitude between part-time and full-time students; if there were differences between students receiving stipends and students not receiving stipends; and if social work students' attitudes toward sex offenders differed based on their news source.

In addition to t-tests, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests were conducted to determine the following: if there were significant differences between students of different ethnicities; if there were significant differences between students in the full-time program, part-time program, and Pathways Distance Learning Program; and if there were differences between social work

students who receive stipends for Title IV-E, and Mental Health, and students who do not receive stipends (General).

### Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the producers that were used to complete the research study. The method design that was used during this study was briefly discussed, as well as a summary of the sample. Furthermore, data collection, survey instruments, data analysis, and the protection of confidentiality were discussed in this chapter. This study was conducted in order to explore social work students' perceptions of sex offenders.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

This chapter will discuss the findings of the study, which were derived from a quantitative analysis of the data using SPSS software using univariate and bivariate analyses. The outcome of the analyses including t-tests, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and Chi Square will also be discussed and presented. A conclusion will summarize the chapter.

#### Description of the Sample

The sample consisted of social work students from California State University, San Bernardino, La Sierra University, and Loma Linda Schools of Social Work. Univariate statistics were performed on the sample and the results are found in Table One. The sample was comprised of mostly female participants (85.1%). The ethnicity that the largest percentage of participants selected was Hispanic (43.9%), followed by White (30.7%), Black (10.5%), and Other (14.8%). Slightly more than half of participants reported that one of their news sources is interaction with peers (53.5%) while only a small portion reported receiving news from peers in other ways (5.3%). Approximately 40% of participants reported that they have children.

A majority of participants are enrolled in the Masters of Social Work Program (68.4%), and the largest percentage of participants reported that they are in a Full Time program (73.7%), followed by participants enrolled in the Part Time program (26.3%). The majority of participants (58.8%) of participants reported that they were not receiving a stipend to attend school while 41.2% reported receiving a stipend. Slightly over half of the sample reported that their news source came from television (51.8%), while exactly half (50%) stated that they got their news from radio. Only a small percentage of participants reported that they received their news from the newspaper (18.4%) while the largest percentage of participants reported that they received their news from the internet (86.0%) (See Table 1).

Table 1. Demographics

Variables	Frequency (N)	Percentages (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	17	14.9
Female	97	85.1
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
White	35	30.7
Black	12	10.5
Hispanic	50	43.9
Other	17	14.8
<b>Children</b>		
Yes	46	40.4
No	68	59.6
<b>Social Work Degree Program</b>		
BASW	36	31.6
MSW	78	68.4

Table 1. Demographics (cont.'d)

Variables	Frequency (N)	Percentages (%)
<b>Type of Student</b>		
Full-Time	84	73.7
Part-Time	30	26.3
<b>Stipend Program</b>		
Stipend Student	39	34.2
Non-Stipend Student	8	7.0
<b>News from Television</b>		
Yes	59	51.8
No	55	48.2
<b>News from Radio</b>		
Yes	57	50.0
No	57	50.0
<b>News from Newspaper</b>		
Yes	21	18.4
No	93	81.6
<b>News from Internet</b>		
Yes	98	86.0
No	16	14.0
<b>News from Peer Interactions</b>		
Yes	61	53.5
No	53	46.5
<b>News from peers (others)</b>		
Yes	6	5.3
No	108	94.7

### Presentation of Survey Variables

In terms of social work students' attitudes toward male sex offenders, 78.2% of participants stated that 50% or more of male sex offenders committed another sexual offense while 61.4% of participants felt that 50% or more of female sex offenders committed another sexual offense. Forty-one percent of participants stated that 50% or less than sex offenders under the

age of 18 committed another sexual crime. Eighty-one percent of participants felt that 50% or more of male rapists sexually reoffend, whereas approximately 60% of participants felt that 50% or more of female rapists sexually reoffend. Sixty-two percent of participants felt that 50% or more of rapists under the age of 18 sexually reoffend. Seventy-nine percent of participants felt that 50% or more of male child molesters sexually reoffend and 64.2% of participants felt that 50% or more of female child molesters sexually reoffend. Fifty-nine percent of participants felt that 50% or less of juvenile child molesters sexually reoffend. A large percentage of participants (86%) stated felt that 50% or more of adult sexually offenders were sexually abused as children. Just fewer than 90% of participants felt that at least 50% or more of juvenile sex offenders were abused as children (See Table 2).

Table 2. Survey Variables

Variables	Frequency (N)	Percentages (%)
<b>Male offenders who reoffend</b>		
Less than 50%	23	21.3
50% or More	89	78.2
<b>Female offenders who reoffend</b>		
Less than 50%	43	37.8
50% or More	70	61.4
<b>Juvenile offenders who reoffend</b>		
Less than 50%	47	41.3
50% or More	67	59.0
<b>Male rapists who sexually reoffend</b>		
Less than 50%	21	18.7
50% or More	92	80.9

Table 2. Survey Variables (cont.'d)

Variables	Frequency (N)	Percentages (%)
<b>Female rapists wo sexually reoffend</b>		
Less than 50%	45	39.6
50% or More	68	59.7
<b>Juvenile rapists who sexually reoffend</b>		
Less than 50%	40	35.4
50% or More	71	62.4
<b>Male child molesters who reoffend</b>		
Less than 50%	23	20.5
50% or More	90	79.3
<b>Female child molesters who reoffend</b>		
Less than 50%	41	36.3
50% or More	73	64.2
<b>Juvenile child molesters who reoffend</b>		
Less than 50%	45	39.8
50% or More	67	59.1
<b>Adult sex offenders sexually abused as children</b>		
Less than 50%	15	13.4
50% or More	98	86.0
<b>Juvenile sex offenders sexually abused as children</b>		
Less than 50%	10	9.0
50% or More	102	89.6

Just over half (56.4%) of participants felt that 50% or more of male sex offenders are mentally ill. A slightly larger percentage (61.6%) of participants felt that 50% or more of female sex offenders are mentally ill. Fifty-four percent of participants felt that 50% or more of juvenile sex offenders are mentally ill. A majority of participants (52.6%) felt that less than 50% of male sexual offenders are brought to the attention of the authorities while an even larger percentage (75.6%) of participants felt that less than 50% of female

sexual offenders are brought to the attention of the authorities. Sixty-six percent of participants felt that less than 50% of juvenile sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities. Regarding the percentage of sex crimes committed by strangers, 82.6% of participants felt that less than 50% of sex crimes are committed by strangers. Eighty-eight percent of participants felt that 50% or more of sex crimes were committed by a family member. Ninety-four percent of participants felt that 50% or more of sex offenders are male, whereas 80% of participants felt that 50% or less of sex offenders are female and 84.3% of participants felt that 50% or less of sex offenders are juveniles. Ninety-two percent of participants felt that 50% or less of sex offenders are children under the age of 12 (See Table 3).

Table 3. Social Work Students' Perceptions of Sex Offenders

Variables	Frequency (N)	Percentages (%)
<b>Male sex offenders who are mentally ill</b>		
Less than 50%	48	42.3
50% or More	64	56.4
<b>Female sex offenders who are mentally ill</b>		
Less than 50%	42	37.1
50% or More	70	61.6
<b>Juvenile offenders who are mentally ill</b>		
Less than 50%	51	44.8
50% or More	62	54.5
<b>Male sex offenders brought to the authorities</b>		
Less than 50%	60	52.6
50% or More	52	45.8
<b>Female sex offenders brought to the authorities</b>		
Less than 50%	86	75.6
50% or More	26	22.9

Table 3. Social Work Students' Perceptions of Sex Offenders (cont.'d)

Variables	Frequency (N)	Percentages (%)
<b>Juvenile sex offenders brought to the authorities</b>		
Less than 50%	76	66.8
50% or More	37	32.6
<b>Sex Crimes committed by strangers</b>		
Less than 50%	94	82.6
50% or More	18	15.8
<b>Sex crimes committed by a family member</b>		
Less than 50%	12	10.7
50% or More	100	88.0
<b>Percentage of sex offenders who are male</b>		
Less than 50%	5	4.5
50% or More	107	94.0
<b>Percentage of sex offenders who are female</b>		
Less than 50%	91	80.0
50% or More	19	16.8
<b>Percentage of sex offenders who are juveniles</b>		
Less than 50%	96	84.3
50% or More	15	13.4
<b>Percentage of sex offenders under the age of 12</b>		
Less than 50%	105	92.3
50% or More	5	4.5

Most of the participants felt that a child under the age of 12 could be a sex offender (78.1%). Just over half (51.8%) of participants felt that a juvenile who commits a sexual crime against another child should not have to register as a sex offender. Of those who answered, 27% of participants felt that a juvenile 14 years or younger who commits a crime against other children should have to register as a sex offender; 52% of participants failed to answer that question. Fifty-seven percent of participants felt that a juvenile who commits a sexual crime against an adult should have to register as a sex

offender. Twenty-nine percent of participants felt that juveniles age 16 or younger who commit a sexual crime against an adult should have to register as a sex offender; 43% of participants failed to answer. The majority of participants identified males as committing the most sexual crimes (88.6%). Just over half of participants stated that they would be comfortable working with a male sex offender (54.4%) and an even larger percentage stated that they would be comfortable working with a female sex offender (64.9%); 70% of participants stated that they would be comfortable working with a juvenile sex offender (See Table 4).

Table 4. Social Work Students' Beliefs of Sex Offenders

Variables	Frequency (N)	Percentages (%)
<b>Can a child under age 12 be a sex offender</b>		
Yes	89	78.1
No	23	20.2
<b>A juvenile who commits a sex crime against a minor should have to register as a sex offender</b>		
Yes	53	46.5
No	59	51.8
<b>Age at which minor offender who commits a crime against a minor should have to register</b>		
Under 14	31	27.2
14 and Older	23	20.3
<b>A juvenile who commits a sex crime against an adult should have to register as a sex offender</b>		
Yes	65	57.0
No	46	40.4
<b>Age at which minor offender who commits a crime against an adult should have to register</b>		
Under 16	33	29.0
16 and Older	32	28.1

Table 4. Social Work Students' Beliefs of Sex Offenders (cont.'d)

Variables	Frequency (N)	Percentages (%)
<b>Who commits the most sexual crimes</b>		
Males	101	88.6
Females	3	2.6
Juveniles	7	6.1
<b>Are you comfortable working with a male sex offender</b>		
Yes	62	54.4
No	48	42.1
<b>Are you comfortable working with a female sex offender</b>		
Yes	74	64.9
No	37	32.5
<b>Are you comfortable working with a juvenile sex offender</b>		
Yes	80	70.2
No	30	26.3

Seventy-seven percent of participants identified that the statement “Treatment is not effective for male sex offenders” was false, whereas 81.6% of participants found the statement “Treatment is not effective for female sex offenders” to be false, and 91.2% of participants found the statement “Treatment is not effective for juvenile sex offenders” to be false. A majority of participants found the statement “The majority of male sex offenders are caught by the authorities, convicted, then placed in prison” to be false, while 94.7% of participants found that the same statement for female sex offenders to be false, and 82.5% of participants found the same statement for juvenile sex offenders to be false. Most participants (89.5%) do not feel that most sexual assaults are committed by strangers, whereas 87.7% of participants felt

that most sexual assaults are committed by a family member. The majority of participants felt male sex offenders reoffend at a higher rate than female sex offenders (74.6%) and 73.7% of participants felt that male sex offenders reoffend at a higher rate than juvenile sex offenders. A majority of participants (86.8%) felt that female sex offenders do not reoffend at a higher rate than male sex offenders and just under 60% of participants felt that female sex offenders do not reoffend at a higher rate than juvenile sex offenders (See Table 5).

Table 5. Social Work Students' Knowledge of Sex Offenders

Variables	Frequency (N)	Percentages (%)
<b>Treatment is not effective for male sex offenders</b>		
True	23	20.2
False	88	77.2
<b>Treatment is not effective for female sex offenders</b>		
True	18	15.8
False	93	81.6
<b>Treatment is not effective for juvenile sex offenders</b>		
True	7	6.1
False	104	91.2
<b>Majority of male sex offenders are caught by the authorities, convicted, and imprisoned</b>		
True	14	12.3
False	97	85.1
<b>Majority of female sex offenders are caught by the authorities, convicted, and imprisoned</b>		
True	3	2.6
False	108	94.7
<b>Majority of juvenile sex offenders are caught by the authorities, convicted, and imprisoned</b>		
True	17	14.9
False	94	82.5

Table 5. Social Work Students' Knowledge of Sex Offenders (cont.'d)

Variables	Frequency (N)	Percentages (%)
<b>Most sexual assaults are committed by strangers</b>		
True	9	7.9
False	102	89.5
<b>Most sexual assaults are committed by family members</b>		
True	100	87.7
False	11	9.6
<b>Male sex offenders reoffend at a higher rate than female sex offenders</b>		
True	85	74.6
False	26	22.8
<b>Male sex offenders reoffend at a higher rate than juvenile sex offenders</b>		
True	84	73.7
False	27	23.7
<b>Female sex offenders reoffend at a higher rate than male sex offenders</b>		
True	12	10.5
False	99	86.8
<b>Female sex offenders reoffend at a higher rate than juvenile sex offenders</b>		
True	44	38.6
False	66	57.9

Most participants (60.5%) agree that residency restrictions should be imposed on all reentering sex offenders, even if it means they are unable to return home due to close proximity of a school, playground, or park. 20% of participants disagreed with that statement while 13.2% of participants felt neutral about the statement. As to the statement “Sex offenders should be prepared to endure threats and harassment from their neighbors once they have been found out due to the sex offender registry”, 39.5% of participants

disagreed with that statement, 38.6% agreed with the statement and 15.8% felt neutral about the statement. The largest percentage of participants (38.6%) agreed that experiencing shame and embarrassment due to the sex offender registry is a consequence sex offenders should learn to accept; 34.2% of participants disagreed with that statement and 21.9% felt neutral about that statement. Most of the participants (47.4%) disagree that juvenile sex offenders should be treated like adult sex offenders where 21.9% agree with that statement and 25.4% felt neutral about that statement (See Table 6).

Table 6. Participants' Perceptions of the Sex Offender Population

Variables	Frequency (N)	Percentages (%)
<b>Residency restrictions should be imposed on all reentering sex offenders even if they can't return home</b>		
Disagree	23	20.2
Neutral	15	13.2
Agree	69	60.5
<b>Sex offenders should be prepared to endure threats and harassment from neighbors</b>		
Disagree	45	39.5
Neutral	18	15.8
Agree	44	38.6
<b>Experiencing shame and embarrassment due to the sex offender registry is a consequence offenders should accept</b>		
Disagree	39	34.2
Neutral	25	21.9
Agree	44	38.6
<b>Juvenile sex offenders should be treated like adult sex offenders</b>		
Disagree	54	47.4
Neutral	29	25.4
Agree	25	21.9

## Presentation of *t*-Tests

### *t*-tests by Gender

To determine whether attitudes of social work students differed by gender, multiple *t*-tests were conducted. There were no significant differences between the genders regarding the survey questions; however, differences between the genders did exist in their answers. Regarding the percentage of male sex offenders committing another sexual offense, men estimated a smaller percentage than women ( $M_m = 59.18$ ;  $M_f = 66.11$ ;  $t(111) = -4.48$ ,  $p = .253$ ). Women tended to estimate that a higher percentage of female sex offenders committed another sexual offense ( $M_m = 49.06$ ,  $M_f = 52.43$ ;  $t(111) = -.483$ ,  $p = .630$ ). Male and female participants were evenly divided as to whether sex offenders who are under 18 commit another sexual crime ( $M_m = 51.00$ ,  $M_f = 50.60$ ;  $t(112) = .062$ ,  $p = .951$ ). Men estimated the percentage of male rapists who reoffend lower than women ( $M_m = 59.00$ ,  $M_f = 75.43$ ;  $t(112) = -.909$ ,  $p = .365$ ) and men also estimated the percentage of female rapists who reoffend lower than women ( $M_m = 43.24$ ,  $M_f = 51.64$ ;  $t(111) = -1.231$ ,  $p = .221$ ). Men and women were fairly evenly split as to the percentage of juvenile offenders who sexually reoffend ( $M_m = 50.47$ ,  $M_f = 53.36$ ;  $t(109) = -.433$ ,  $p = .666$ ). Regarding child molesters and the percentage of whom reoffend, women estimated that male child molesters sexually reoffend ( $M_m = 61.82$ ,  $M_f = 67.46$ ;  $t(111) = -.868$ ,  $p = .388$ ), while men and women estimated almost equally the percentage of female child molesters who reoffend ( $M_m = 52.65$ ,  $M_f$

= 53.93;  $t(112) = -.176, p = .860$ ) and the percentage of juvenile child molesters who reoffend ( $M_m = 51.75, M_f = 54.6; t(110) = -.352, p = .725$ ).

Both men and women estimated the percentage of adult sex offenders who were sexually abused as children as being high ( $M_m = 78.06, M_f = 72.36; t(111) = 1.010, p = .315$ ) as well as the percentage of juvenile sex offenders who were sexually abused as children ( $M_m = 79.50, M_f = 77.06; t(110) = .458, p = .648$ ). Men estimated the percentage of male sex offenders as being mentally ill higher than women estimated ( $M_m = 61.25, M_f = 52.97; t(110) = 1.094, p = .276$ ) as well as the percentage of female sex offenders as being mentally ill ( $M_m = 57.81, M_f = 52.79; t(110) = 1.094, p = .516$ ) and the percentage of juvenile sex offenders as being mentally ill ( $M_m = 56.31, M_f = 48.44; t(111) = .994, p = .323$ ). Estimation of the percentage of sex offenders who are brought to the attention of the authorities tended to be fairly low. Women estimated that a higher percentage of male sex offenders who were brought to the attention of the authorities than men ( $M_m = 38.88, M_f = 47.31; t(110) = -1.443, p = .152$ ), and women also estimated that a higher percentage of female sex offenders were brought to the attention of the authorities than men ( $M_m = 25.44, M_f = 29.36; t(110) = -.740, p = .461$ ); however, men estimated that higher percentage of juvenile sex offenders who were brought to the attention of the authorities than women ( $M_m = 38.38, M_f = 36.05; t(111) = .402, p = .689$ ). Women estimated that a higher percentage of sex crimes were committed by strangers than men ( $M_m = 23.75, M_f = 31.07; t(110) = -$

1.313,  $p = .192$ ) and men estimated that higher percentage of sex crimes were committed by family members than women ( $M_m = 74.38$ ,  $M_f = 38.55$ ;  $t(110) = 1.172$ ,  $p = .244$ ). Women estimated that a higher percentage of sex offenders are male than men ( $M_m = 67.63$ ,  $M_f = 71.81$ ;  $t(110) = -1.055$ ,  $p = .294$ ) and men estimated that a higher percentage of sex offenders are female than women ( $M_m = 35.06$ ,  $M_f = 31.12$ ;  $t(108) = .884$ ,  $p = .379$ ). Men and women estimated an equal percentage of sex offenders as being juveniles ( $M_m = 30.31$ ,  $M_f = 30.03$ ;  $t(109) = .062$ ,  $p = .950$ ) and women estimated that a higher percentage of sex offenders were children under the age of 12 than men ( $M_m = 12.87$ ,  $M_f = 14.51$ ;  $t(108) = -.387$ ,  $p = .699$ ) (See Table 7).

Table 7. Students' Attitudes by Gender

<b>Survey Questions</b>	<b><math>M_m</math></b>	<b><math>M_f</math></b>	<b><math>t</math></b>	<b><math>df</math></b>	<b><math>p</math></b>
What percent of male sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	59.18	66.11	-1.148	111	.253
What percent of female sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	49.06	52.43	-.483	111	.630
What percent of juvenile sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	51.00	50.60	.062	112	.951
What percent of male rapists sexually reoffend	59.00	75.43	-.909	112	.365
What percent of female rapists sexually reoffend	43.24	51.64	-1.231	111	.221
What percent of juvenile rapists sexually reoffend	50.47	53.36	-.433	109	.666
What percent of male child molesters sexually reoffend	61.82	67.46	-.868	111	.388
What percent of female child molesters sexually reoffend	52.65	53.93	-.176	112	.860
What percent of juvenile child molesters sexually reoffend	51.75	54.16	-.352	110	.725
What percent of adult sex offenders were sexually abused as children	78.06	72.36	1.010	111	.315
What percent of juvenile sex offenders were sexually abused as children	79.50	77.06	.458	110	.648

Table 7. Students' Attitudes by Gender (cont.'d)

Survey Questions	$M_m$	$M_f$	$t$	$df$	$p$
What percent of male sex offenders are mentally ill	61.25	52.97	1.094	110	.276
What percent of female sex offenders are mentally ill	57.81	52.79	.651	110	.516
What percent of juvenile sex offenders are mentally ill	56.31	48.44	.994	111	.323
What percent of male sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	38.88	47.31	-1.443	110	.152
What percent of female sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	25.44	29.36	-.740	110	.461
What percent of juvenile sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	38.38	36.05	.402	111	.689
What percent of sex crimes are committed by strangers	23.75	31.07	-1.313	110	.192
What percent of sex crimes are committed by a family member	74.38	68.55	1.172	110	.244
What percent of sex offenders are male	67.63	71.81	-1.055	110	.294
What percent of sex offenders are female	35.06	31.12	.884	108	.379
What percent of sex offenders are juveniles	30.31	30.03	.062	109	.950
What percent of sex offenders are children under the age of 12	12.87	14.51	-.387	108	.699

### *t*-Tests by Children

To determine whether having children can impact attitudes of social work students towards sex offenders, *t*-tests were conducted. There was a significant difference between students who have children and students who do not have children and their estimation of the percentage of adult sex offenders were sexually abused as children,  $M_c = 79.35$   $M_{nc} = 68.96$ ;  $t(111) = 2.672$ ,  $p = .009$ . Additionally, students who reported having children significantly differed from students who did not report having children and their estimation of the percentage of juvenile sex offenders who were sexually

abused as children,  $M_c = 82.61$   $M_{nc} = 73.79$ ;  $t(110) = 2.390$ ,  $p = .019$ .

Significant differences were found between the students who reported having children and those who reported not having children and their estimation in the percentage of sex offenders who are male,  $M_c = 74.96$   $M_{nc} = 68.70$ ;  $t(110) = 2.246$ ,  $p = .027$  and their estimation in the percentage of sex offenders who are female  $M_c = 27.89$   $M_{nc} = 34.32$ ;  $t(108) = -2.042$ ,  $p = .044$ . There were no significant differences between students with children and students who do not have children (See Table 8).

Table 8. Students' Attitudes Based on Having Children or Not

<b>Survey Questions</b>	<b><math>M_c</math></b>	<b><math>M_{nc}</math></b>	<b><math>t</math></b>	<b><math>df</math></b>	<b><math>p</math></b>
What percent of male sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	67.24	63.58	.830	111	.408
What percent of female sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	51.78	52.01	-.046	111	.964
What percent of juvenile sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	54.37	48.15	1.334	112	.185
What percent of male rapists sexually reoffend	73.67	72.51	.088	112	.930
What percent of female rapists sexually reoffend	53.42	48.35	1.015	111	.312
What percent of juvenile rapists sexually reoffend	56.56	50.44	1.256	109	.212
What percent of male child molesters sexually reoffend	70.17	64.16	1.277	111	.204
What percent of female child molesters sexually reoffend	57.74	51.03	1.283	112	.202
What percent of juvenile child molesters sexually reoffend	58.67	50.42	1.719	110	.088
What percent of adult sex offenders were sexually abused as children*	79.35	68.93	2.672	111	.009
What percent of juvenile sex offenders were sexually abused as children*	82.61	73.79	2.390	110	.019
What percent of male sex offenders are mentally ill	55.93	52.91	.560	110	.577

Table 8. Students' Attitudes Based on Having Children or Not (cont.'d)

Survey Questions	$M_c$	$M_{nc}$	$t$	$df$	$p$
What percent of female sex offenders are mentally ill	56.09	51.71	.798	110	.427
What percent of juvenile sex offenders are mentally ill	50.11	49.18	.165	111	.869
What percent of male sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	48.76	44.33	1.056	110	.293
What percent of female sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	31.96	26.61	1.427	110	.156
What percent of juvenile sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	36.20	36.51	-.076	111	.940
What percent of sex crimes are committed by strangers	33.09	27.97	1.286	110	.201
What percent of sex crimes are committed by a family member	68.09	70.25	-.608	110	.544
What percent of sex offenders are male	74.96	68.70	2.246	110	.027
What percent of sex offenders are female	27.89	34.32	-2.042	108	.044
What percent of sex offenders are juveniles	30.34	29.90	.138	109	.891
What percent of sex offenders are children under the age of 12	13.84	14.58	-.248	108	.805

\* Indicates significance at the .05 level

#### t-Tests by Social Work Program

To determine whether attitudes differed between social work programs, t-tests grouped by social work program were conducted. A significant difference was found between students in the BASW programs and students in the MSW programs in the estimated percentage of sex offenders who are children under the age of 12,  $M_{bsw} = 9.80$   $M_{msw} = 16.37$ ;  $t(108) = -2.153$ ,  $p = .034$ . No other significant differences were found between BASW and MSW students (See Table 9).

Table 9. Difference in Attitudes by Social Work Program

<b>Survey Questions</b>	<b>M<sub>bsw</sub></b>	<b>M<sub>msw</sub></b>	<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p</b>
What percent of male sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	65.53	64.86	.144	111	.886
What percent of female sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	54.47	50.73	.701	111	.485
What percent of juvenile sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	52.11	49.99	.428	112	.669
What percent of male rapists sexually reoffend	85.89	67.03	1.368	112	.174
What percent of female rapists sexually reoffend	54.54	48.50	1.144	111	.255
What percent of juvenile rapists sexually reoffend	53.76	52.55	.233	109	.816
What percent of male child molesters sexually reoffend	69.71	65.22	.896	111	.372
What percent of female child molesters sexually reoffend	56.17	52.62	.640	112	.524
What percent of juvenile child molesters sexually reoffend	56.57	52.56	.780	110	.437
What percent of adult sex offenders were sexually abused as children	72.08	73.68	-.375	111	.708
What percent of juvenile sex offenders were sexually abused as children	74.19	78.93	-1.196	110	.234
What percent of male sex offenders are mentally ill	54.72	53.88	.147	110	.883
What percent of female sex offenders are mentally ill	54.03	53.26	.132	110	.895
What percent of juvenile sex offenders are mentally ill	52.36	48.25	.693	111	.490
What percent of male sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	45.78	46.26	-.110	110	.913
What percent of female sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	26.81	29.75	-.740	110	.461
What percent of juvenile sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	34.00	37.49	-.809	111	.420
What percent of sex crimes are committed by strangers	35.44	27.46	1.928	110	.056
What percent of sex crimes are committed by a family member	70.11	69.04	.286	110	.775
What percent of sex offenders are male	71.33	71.16	.059	110	.953
What percent of sex offenders are female	34.43	30.41	1.192	108	.236
What percent of sex offenders are juveniles	32.63	28.89	1.104	109	.272
What percent of sex offenders are children under the age of 12*	9.80	16.37	-2.153	108	.034

\* Indicates significance at the .05 level

### t-Tests by Type of Program

Multiple *t*-tests were conducted to determine if there were differences in attitude between part-time students and full-time students in social work. Significant differences were found between full-time and part-time students and their estimated percentage of juvenile rapists who sexually reoffend,  $M_{pt} = 49.18$   $M_{ft} = 63.48$ ;  $t(109) = -2.693$ ,  $p = .008$ . A significant difference was found between full-time and part-time students and their estimation of the percent of juvenile child molesters who sexually reoffend,  $M_{pt} = 50.93$   $M_{ft} = 61.70$ ;  $t(110) = -2.031$ ,  $p = .045$ . A significant difference was also found between full-time and part-time students and their estimation of the percent of juvenile sex offenders who were sexually abused as children,  $M_{pt} = 75.31$   $M_{ft} = 83.41$ ;  $t(110) = -1.937$ ,  $p = .055$ . No other significant differences were found between full-time and part-time students (See Table 10).

Table 10. Attitudes between Full-Time and Part-Time Students

<b>Survey Questions</b>	<b><math>M_{ft}</math></b>	<b><math>M_{pt}</math></b>	<b><math>t</math></b>	<b><math>df</math></b>	<b><math>p</math></b>
What percent of male sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	64.23	67.52	-.663	111	.509
What percent of female sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	52.23	51.03	.209	111	.835
What percent of juvenile sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	48.13	57.73	-1.861	112	.065
What percent of male rapists sexually reoffend	74.18	69.63	.310	112	.757
What percent of female rapists sexually reoffend	48.96	54.27	-.957	111	.340
What percent of juvenile rapists sexually reoffend*	49.18	63.48	-2.693	109	.008
What percent of male child molesters sexually reoffend	65.60	69.40	-.721	111	.472

\* Indicates significance at the .05 level

Table 10. Attitudes between Full-Time and Part-Time Students (cont.'d)

<b>Survey Questions</b>	<b>M<sub>ft</sub></b>	<b>M<sub>pt</sub></b>	<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p</b>
What percent of female child molesters sexually reoffend	51.79	59.20	-1.272	112	.206
What percent of juvenile child molesters sexually reoffend*	50.93	61.70	-2.031	110	.045
What percent of adult sex offenders were sexually abused as children	71.60	77.50	-1.328	111	.187
What percent of juvenile sex offenders were sexually abused as children*	75.31	83.41	-1.937	110	.055
What percent of male sex offenders are mentally ill	53.13	57.07	-.649	110	.518
What percent of female sex offenders are mentally ill	53.07	54.76	-.273	110	.785
What percent of juvenile sex offenders are mentally ill	49.12	50.77	-.262	111	.794
What percent of male sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	47.78	41.53	1.351	110	.180
What percent of female sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	30.13	25.00	1.216	110	.227
What percent of juvenile sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	38.41	30.77	1.695	111	.093
What percent of sex crimes are committed by strangers	30.78	27.97	.635	110	.527
What percent of sex crimes are committed by a family member	69.90	67.97	.491	110	.625
What percent of sex offenders are male	71.63	70.07	.497	110	.620
What percent of sex offenders are female	62.96	28.14	1.358	108	.177
What percent of sex offenders are juveniles	29.70	31.07	-.383	109	.702
What percent of sex offenders are children under the age of 12	14.33	14.17	.049	108	.961

\* Indicates significance at the .05 level

### t-Tests by Stipend Program

Several *t*-tests were conducted to determine if there are differences between students receiving stipends and students not receiving stipends. A significant difference was found between stipend students and non-stipend students and the estimated percent of juvenile sex offenders who are brought to the attention of the authorities,  $M_s = 41.37$   $M_{ns} = 32.96$ ;  $t(111) = 2.089$ ,  $p =$

.039. A significant difference was also found between stipend students and non-stipend students and the estimated percent of juvenile sex offenders under the age of 12,  $M_s = 17.96$   $M_{ns} = 11.74$ ;  $t(108) = 2.149$ ,  $p = .034$ . No other significant differences were found between stipend students and non-stipend students (See Table 11).

Table 11. Students' Attitudes by who Receives a Stipend

<b>Survey Questions</b>	<b><math>M_s</math></b>	<b><math>M_{ns}</math></b>	<b><math>t</math></b>	<b><math>df</math></b>	<b><math>p</math></b>
What percent of male sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	66.04	64.40	.371	111	.712
What percent of female sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	52.80	51.31	.294	111	.770
What percent of juvenile sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	52.77	49.18	.767	112	.444
What percent of male rapists sexually reoffend	66.89	77.25	-.791	112	.430
What percent of female rapists sexually reoffend	50.79	50.08	.143	111	.887
What percent of juvenile rapists sexually reoffend	56.85	50.14	1.384	109	.169
What percent of male child molesters sexually reoffend	63.79	68.62	-.027	111	.306
What percent of female child molesters sexually reoffend	52.21	54.81	-.494	112	.622
What percent of juvenile child molesters sexually reoffend	58.13	50.80	1.523	110	.131
What percent of adult sex offenders were sexually abused as children	73.26	73.10	.039	111	.969
What percent of juvenile sex offenders were sexually abused as children	79.84	75.78	1.077	110	.284
What percent of male sex offenders are mentally ill	50.84	56.37	-1.023	110	.309
What percent of female sex offenders are mentally ill	50.20	55.73	-1.007	110	.316
What percent of juvenile sex offenders are mentally ill	44.87	52.78	-1.413	111	.160
What percent of male sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	49.30	43.88	1.303	110	.195

\* Indicates significance at the .05 level

Table 11. Students' Attitudes by who Receives a Stipend (cont.'d)

<b>Survey Questions</b>	<b>M<sub>s</sub></b>	<b>M<sub>ns</sub></b>	<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p</b>
What percent of female sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	31.60	26.93	1.240	110	.218
What percent of juvenile sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities*	41.37	32.96	2.089	111	.039
What percent of sex crimes are committed by strangers	28.96	30.75	-.447	110	.656
What percent of sex crimes are committed by a family member	69.09	69.58	-.138	110	.890
What percent of sex offenders are male	68.75	72.87	-1.458	110	.148
What percent of sex offenders are female	35.11	29.41	1.796	108	.075
What percent of sex offenders are juveniles	33.09	28.02	1.594	109	.114
What percent of sex offenders are children under the age of 12*	17.96	11.74	2.149	108	.034

\* Indicates significance at the .05 level

#### t-Tests by Television as News Source

t-tests were conducted to determine if social work students' attitudes toward sex offenders differed based on whether television was their primary news source or not. A significant difference between students who reported that they received their news from the newspaper versus those who do not receive news from the newspaper was found in the estimated percentage of female sex offenders who commit another sexual offense,  $M_n = 57.43$   $M_{nn} = 46.11$ ;  $t(111) = 2.321$ ,  $p = .022$ . A significant difference was found in the estimated percent of juvenile rapists who sexually reoffend,  $M_n = 58.36$   $M_{nn} = 47.38$ ;  $t(109) = 2.334$ ,  $p = .021$ . No other significant differences were found between students who get their news from newspapers and students who do not get their news from newspapers (See Table 12).

Table 12. Attitudes towards Sex Offenders by News Source (Television)

<b>Survey Questions</b>	<b>M<sub>r</sub></b>	<b>M<sub>nr</sub></b>	<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p</b>
What percent of male sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	67.05	62.98	.940	111	.349
What percent of female sex offenders commit another sexual offense?*	57.43	46.11	2.321	111	.022
What percent of juvenile sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	52.25	48.95	.718	112	.474
What percent of male rapists sexually reoffend	67.64	78.71	-.858	112	.393
What percent of female rapists sexually reoffend	52.88	47.73	1.054	111	.294
What percent of juvenile rapists sexually reoffend	58.36	47.38	2.334	109	.021
What percent of male child molesters sexually reoffend	68.90	64.20	1.012	111	.314
What percent of female child molesters sexually reoffend	56.71	50.55	1.199	112	.233
What percent of juvenile child molesters sexually reoffend	56.28	51.25	1.056	110	.293
What percent of adult sex offenders were sexually abused as children	72.40	73.98	-.401	111	.689
What percent of juvenile sex offenders were sexually abused as children	76.16	78.71	-.686	110	.494
What percent of male sex offenders are mentally ill	54.46	53.84	.116	110	.908
What percent of female sex offenders are mentally ill	53.60	53.42	.033	110	.974
What percent of juvenile sex offenders are mentally ill	49.19	49.95	-.136	111	.892
What percent of male sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	49.03	42.96	1.484	110	.141
What percent of female sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	29.28	28.31	.261	110	.795
What percent of juvenile sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities*	38.07	34.60	.862	111	.390
What percent of sex crimes are committed by strangers	29.74	30.33	-.150	110	.881
What percent of sex crimes are committed by a family member	71.04	67.67	.965	110	.337
What percent of sex offenders are male	70.77	71.67	-.323	110	.747
What percent of sex offenders are female	32.53	30.85	.530	108	.597
What percent of sex offenders are juveniles	29.35	30.83	-.469	109	.640
What percent of sex offenders are children under the age of 12	15.16	13.40	.608	108	.544

\* Indicates significance at the .05 level

*t* – Tests by Radio as News Source

To determine if social work students' attitudes differed based on whether they used the radio as their primary news source or not, multiple *t*-Tests were conducted. No significant differences were found between social work students who used radio as their primary news source and those who do not (See Table 13).

Table 13. Attitudes towards Sex Offenders by News Source (Radio)

<b>Survey Questions</b>	<b>M<sub>r</sub></b>	<b>M<sub>nr</sub></b>	<b><i>t</i></b>	<b><i>df</i></b>	<b><i>p</i></b>
What percent of male sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	66.09	64.03	.473	111	.637
What percent of female sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	54.95	48.84	1.232	111	.221
What percent of juvenile sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	49.53	51.79	-.491	112	.624
What percent of male rapists sexually reoffend	66.33	79.63	-1.034	112	.304
What percent of female rapists sexually reoffend	53.18	47.61	1.139	111	.257
What percent of juvenile rapists sexually reoffend	54.86	50.95	.814	109	.417
What percent of male child molesters sexually reoffend	67.53	65.68	.397	111	.692
What percent of female child molesters sexually reoffend	58.46	49.02	1.853	112	.066
What percent of juvenile child molesters sexually reoffend	55.27	52.36	.609	110	.544
What percent of adult sex offenders were sexually abused as children	73.39	72.95	.113	111	.911
What percent of juvenile sex offenders were sexually abused as children	75.38	79.45	-1.099	110	.274
What percent of male sex offenders are mentally ill	53.80	54.50	-.131	110	.896
What percent of female sex offenders are mentally ill	54.14	52.88	.234	110	.815
What percent of juvenile sex offenders are mentally ill	49.45	49.67	-.040	111	.968
What percent of male sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	49.27	42.95	1.547	110	.125

\* Indicates significance at the .05 level

Table 13. Attitudes towards Sex Offenders by News Source (Radio) (cont.'d)

<b>Survey Questions</b>	<b>M<sub>r</sub></b>	<b>M<sub>nr</sub></b>	<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p</b>
What percent of female sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	29.48	28.13	.365	110	.716
What percent of juvenile sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	37.25	35.53	.428	111	.670
What percent of sex crimes are committed by strangers	32.38	27.68	1.202	110	.232
What percent of sex crimes are committed by a family member	69.61	69.16	.128	110	.899
What percent of sex offenders are male	69.34	73.09	-1.353	110	.179
What percent of sex offenders are female	34.41	28.87	1.780	108	.078
What percent of sex offenders are juveniles	31.05	29.07	.628	109	.532
What percent of sex offenders are children under the age of 12	15.16	13.40	.608	108	.544

\* Indicates significance at the .05 level

#### t-Tests by Newspaper as News Source

Multiple *t*-tests were conducted to determine if there were significant differences in social work students' attitudes toward sex offenders. There were no significant differences between students who used the newspaper as their news source and those who did not (See Table 14).

Table 14. Attitudes towards Sex Offenders by News Source (Newspaper)

<b>Survey Questions</b>	<b>M<sub>n</sub></b>	<b>M<sub>nn</sub></b>	<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p</b>
What percent of male sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	64.05	65.30	-.225	111	.822
What percent of female sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	53.10	51.65	.225	111	.822
What percent of juvenile sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	57.29	49.16	1.377	112	.171
What percent of male rapists sexually reoffend	68.62	73.97	-.321	112	.749
What percent of female rapists sexually reoffend	58.85	48.55	1.620	111	.108

\* Indicates significance at the .05 level

Table 14. Attitudes towards Sex Offenders by News Source (Newspaper)  
(cont.'d)

Survey Questions	M <sub>n</sub>	M <sub>nn</sub>	t	df	p
What percent of juvenile rapists sexually reoffend	58.70	51.65	1.132	109	.260
What percent of male child molesters sexually reoffend	65.57	66.85	-.213	111	.832
What percent of female child molesters sexually reoffend	57.76	52.83	.742	112	.460
What percent of juvenile child molesters sexually reoffend	56.80	53.16	.583	110	.561
What percent of adult sex offenders were sexually abused as children	80.70	71.55	1.792	111	.076
What percent of juvenile sex offenders were sexually abused as children	83.45	76.10	1.528	110	.129
What percent of male sex offenders are mentally ill	56.40	53.66	.394	110	.694
What percent of female sex offenders are mentally ill	56.20	52.92	.464	110	.643
What percent of juvenile sex offenders are mentally ill	50.35	49.39	.133	111	.895
What percent of male sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	45.90	46.15	-.047	110	.963
What percent of female sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	26.10	29.39	-.679	110	.499
What percent of juvenile sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities*	39.80	35.65	.788	111	.432
What percent of sex crimes are committed by strangers	32.00	29.60	.468	110	.641
What percent of sex crimes are committed by a family member	69.30	69.40	-.022	110	.982
What percent of sex offenders are male	68.80	71.74	-.808	110	.421
What percent of sex offenders are female	32.05	31.61	.107	108	.915
What percent of sex offenders are juveniles	33.00	29.43	.871	109	.385
What percent of sex offenders are children under the age of 12	16.06	13.93	.541	108	.590

\* Indicates significance at the .05 level

#### t-Tests by Internet as News Source

Multiple *t*-tests were conducted to determine if there were significant differences between social work students who use the internet as their news

source and students who do not. A significant difference was found between students who use the internet as their news source and those who did not and their estimated percentage of sex crimes committed by strangers,  $M_i = 28.36$   $M_{ni} = 40.00$ ;  $t(110) = -2.112$ ,  $p = .037$ . No other significant differences were found between those who used the internet as their primary news source and those who did not (See Table 15).

Table 15. Attitudes towards Sex Offenders by News Source (Internet)

<b>Survey Questions</b>	<b><math>M_i</math></b>	<b><math>M_{ni}</math></b>	<b><math>t</math></b>	<b><math>df</math></b>	<b><math>p</math></b>
What percent of male sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	64.86	66.47	-.252	111	.802
What percent of female sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	51.66	53.60	-.263	111	.793
What percent of juvenile sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	50.00	54.69	-.707	112	.481
What percent of male rapists sexually reoffend	74.57	63.25	.609	112	.543
What percent of female rapists sexually reoffend	50.84	47.56	.465	111	.643
What percent of juvenile rapists sexually reoffend	52.98	52.53	.063	109	.950
What percent of male child molesters sexually reoffend	67.72	59.88	1.182	111	.240
What percent of female child molesters sexually reoffend	54.32	50.19	.555	112	.580
What percent of juvenile child molesters sexually reoffend	53.33	56.69	-.491	110	.624
What percent of adult sex offenders were sexually abused as children	72.85	75.13	-.402	111	.688
What percent of juvenile sex offenders were sexually abused as children	76.41	83.87	-1.375	110	.172
What percent of male sex offenders are mentally ill	54.54	51.67	.367	110	.714
What percent of female sex offenders are mentally ill	53.60	52.93	.084	110	.933
What percent of juvenile sex offenders are mentally ill	50.76	42.25	1.076	111	.284
What percent of male sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	45.76	48.19	-.412	110	.681

\* Indicates significance at the .05 level

Table 15. Attitudes towards Sex Offenders by News Source (Internet)  
(cont.'d)

<b>Survey Questions</b>	<b>M<sub>i</sub></b>	<b>M<sub>ni</sub></b>	<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p</b>
What percent of female sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	27.95	34.33	-1.175	110	.242
What percent of juvenile sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	36.28	37.00	-.125	111	.901
What percent of sex crimes are committed by strangers*	28.36	40.00	-2.112	110	.037
What percent of sex crimes are committed by a family member	70.68	61.63	1.839	110	.069
What percent of sex offenders are male	72.28	64.81	1.902	110	.060
What percent of sex offenders are female	31.49	32.93	-.313	108	.755
What percent of sex offenders are juveniles	30.13	29.75	.084	109	.934
What percent of sex offenders are children under the age of 12	14.30	14.19	.027	108	.979

\* Indicates significance at the .05 level

#### t-Tests by Peers as News Source

To determine if there were significant differences between social work students who use peers as their news source and those who did not and their attitudes toward sex offenders, t-tests were conducted. No significant differences were found between students who used peers as their news source and those who did not (See Table 16).

Table 16. Attitudes towards Sex Offenders by News Source (Peers)

<b>Survey Questions</b>	<b>M<sub>p</sub></b>	<b>M<sub>np</sub></b>	<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p</b>
What percent of male sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	63.36	67.08	-.856	111	.394
What percent of female sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	52.69	51.02	.333	111	.739

Table 16. Attitudes towards Sex Offenders by News Source (Peers) (cont.'d)

<b>Survey Questions</b>	<b>M<sub>p</sub></b>	<b>M<sub>np</sub></b>	<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p</b>
What percent of juvenile sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	50.39	50.96	-.123	112	.902
What percent of male rapists sexually reoffend	65.89	81.15	-1.185	112	.238
What percent of female rapists sexually reoffend	52.50	47.96	.926	111	.357
What percent of juvenile rapists sexually reoffend	53.31	52.48	.171	109	.865
What percent of male child molesters sexually reoffend	66.23	67.04	-.172	111	.863
What percent of female child molesters sexually reoffend	55.51	51.70	.737	112	.463
What percent of juvenile child molesters sexually reoffend	54.42	53.13	.270	110	.788
What percent of adult sex offenders were sexually abused as children	71.72	74.81	-.783	111	.435
What percent of juvenile sex offenders were sexually abused as children	74.52	80.75	-1.691	110	.094
What percent of male sex offenders are mentally ill	58.07	49.63	1.598	110	.113
What percent of female sex offenders are mentally ill	57.07	49.40	1.426	110	.157
What percent of juvenile sex offenders are mentally ill	53.38	45.23	1.482	111	.141
What percent of male sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	49.64	42.17	1.835	110	.069
What percent of female sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	30.15	27.25	.779	110	.438
What percent of juvenile sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	36.22	36.57	-.086	111	.931
What percent of sex crimes are committed by strangers	28.67	31.60	-.745	110	.458
What percent of sex crimes are committed by a family member	71.47	66.98	1.289	110	.200
What percent of sex offenders are male	71.85	70.48	.489	110	.626
What percent of sex offenders are female	34.03	28.98	1.615	108	.109
What percent of sex offenders are juveniles	30.22	29.90	.100	109	.921
What percent of sex offenders are children under the age of 12	14.41	14.13	.096	108	.924

## Presentation of ANOVA Results

### Differences Based on Race

To determine if there were significant differences between students of different ethnicities, White, Black, Hispanic, and Other, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted. A significant difference was found between students of different ethnicities and the estimated percentage of sex offenders who are male,  $F(3, 108) = 3.012, p = .033$ . A post hoc Tukey test demonstrated that Black students differed significantly from White students in their estimated percent of sex offenders who are male. An additional significant difference was found between students of different ethnicities and the estimated percentage of juvenile sex offenders,  $F(3, 107) = 3.628, p = .015$ . A post hoc Tukey test demonstrated that Hispanic students differed significantly from other students in the estimated percentage of sex offenders who are juvenile. There was no significant difference between the other races (See Table 17).

Table 17. Students' Attitudes by Ethnicity

<b>Survey Questions</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p</b>
What percent of male sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	1.081	3 109	.360
What percent of female sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	.730	3 109	.536
What percent of juvenile sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	.460	3 110	.711
What percent of male rapists sexually reoffend	1.545	3 110	.207
What percent of female rapists sexually reoffend	.389	3 109	.761

\* Indicates significance at the .05 level

Table 17. Students' Attitudes by Ethnicity (cont.'d)

<b>Survey Questions</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p</b>
What percent of juvenile rapists sexually reoffend*	.037	3 107	.990
What percent of male child molesters sexually reoffend	1.021	3 109	.386
What percent of female child molesters sexually reoffend	1.868	3 110	.139
What percent of juvenile child molesters sexually reoffend	.166	3 108	.919
What percent of adult sex offenders were sexually abused as children	1.771	3 109	.157
What percent of juvenile sex offenders were sexually abused as children	1.343	3 108	.264
What percent of male sex offenders are mentally ill	.456	3 108	.714
What percent of female sex offenders are mentally ill	.853	3 108	.468
What percent of juvenile sex offenders are mentally ill	.140	3 109	.936
What percent of male sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	2.584	3 108	.057
What percent of female sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	2.533	3 108	.061
What percent of juvenile sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	1.243	3 109	.298
What percent of sex crimes are committed by strangers	1.253	3 108	.294
What percent of sex crimes are committed by a family member	1.146	3 108	.334
What percent of sex offenders are male*	3.012	3 108	.033
What percent of sex offenders are female	1.521	3 106	.213
What percent of sex offenders are juveniles*	3.628	3 107	.015
What percent of sex offenders are children under the age of 12	1.416	3 106	.242

\* Indicates significance at the .05 level

### Differences Based on Type of Learning Program

To determine if there were significant differences between students in the full-time program, part-time program, and Pathways Distance Learning Program an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted. A significant

difference was found between students in different programs and the estimated percentage of juvenile rapists who sexually reoffend,  $F(2,108) = 3.905, p = .023$ . A post hoc Tukey test demonstrated that students in the full-time program and students in the Pathway Distance Education Program differed significantly in their estimations of the percentage of juvenile rapists who sexually reoffend at  $p < .05$ ; the part-time group was not significantly different from the full-time group or the Pathways Distance Learning group. No other significant differences were found between learning groups (See Table 18).

Table 18. Differences between Students in the Full-Time, Part-Time, and Pathway Distant Learning Program

Survey Questions	F	df	p
What percent of male sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	1.1444	2 110	.322
What percent of female sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	1.110	2 110	.333
What percent of juvenile sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	2.613	2 111	.078
What percent of male rapists sexually reoffend	.117	2 111	.890
What percent of female rapists sexually reoffend	1.313	2 110	.273
What percent of juvenile rapists sexually reoffend*	3.905	2 108	.023
What percent of male child molesters sexually reoffend	.400	2 110	.672
What percent of female child molesters sexually reoffend	1.118	2 111	.330
What percent of juvenile child molesters sexually reoffend	2.044	2 109	.134

\* Indicates significance at the .05 level

Table 18. Differences between Students in Full-Time, Part-Time, and Pathways Distant Learning Program (cont.'d)

<b>Survey Questions</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p</b>
What percent of adult sex offenders were sexually abused as children	.912	2 110	.405
What percent of juvenile sex offenders were sexually abused as children	2.103	2 109	.127
What percent of male sex offenders are mentally ill	.900	2 109	.410
What percent of female sex offenders are mentally ill	.399	2 109	.672
What percent of juvenile sex offenders are mentally ill	1.038	2 109	.357
What percent of male sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	1.483	2 109	.232
What percent of female sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	.812	2 109	.446
What percent of juvenile sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	1.730	2 110	.182
What percent of sex crimes are committed by strangers	1.052	2 109	.353
What percent of sex crimes are committed by a family member	1.385	2 109	.255
What percent of sex offenders are male	.418	2 109	.659
What percent of sex offenders are female	.950	2 107	.390
What percent of sex offenders are juveniles	.128	2 108	.880
What percent of sex offenders are children under the age of 12	.045	2 107	.956

\* Indicates significance at the .05 level

#### Differences based on Type of Stipend Program

To determine if there were differences between social work students who receive stipends for Title IV-E, Mental Health, and students who do not receive stipends (General), an Analysis of Variance was conducted. A significant difference was found between students and their estimated percentage of sex crimes committed by a family member,  $F(2, 109) = 4.248, p$

= .017. A post hoc Tukey test determined that there was a significant difference between Title IV-E stipend students and Mental Health stipend students and their estimation of the percentage of sex crimes committed by a family member. A significant difference also existed between Mental Health Stipend students and general students (See Table 19).

Table 19. Differences between Students who receive a Stipend and Students who Do Not

<b>Survey Questions</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p</b>
What percent of male sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	.169	2 110	.845
What percent of female sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	1.058	2 110	.351
What percent of juvenile sex offenders commit another sexual offense?	.558	2 111	.574
What percent of male rapists sexually reoffend	.347	2 111	.708
What percent of female rapists sexually reoffend	.311	2 110	.733
What percent of juvenile rapists sexually reoffend*	1.888	2 108	.156
What percent of male child molesters sexually reoffend	.525	2 110	.593
What percent of female child molesters sexually reoffend	.149	2 111	.862
What percent of juvenile child molesters sexually reoffend	1.592	2 109	.208
What percent of adult sex offenders were sexually abused as children	.063	2 110	.939
What percent of juvenile sex offenders were sexually abused as children	1.409	2 109	.249
What percent of male sex offenders are mentally ill	1.386	2 109	.254
What percent of female sex offenders are mentally ill	1.760	2 109	.177
What percent of juvenile sex offenders are mentally ill	1.156	2 110	.319
What percent of male sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	1.438	2 109	.242

\* Indicates significance at the .05 level

Table 19. Differences between Students who receive a Stipend and Students who Do Not (cont.'d)

<b>Survey Questions</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p</b>
What percent of female sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	1.411	2 109	.248
What percent of juvenile sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities	2.405	2 110	.095
What percent of sex crimes are committed by strangers	.099	2 109	.905
What percent of sex crimes are committed by a family member*	4.248	2 109	.017
What percent of sex offenders are male*	1.892	2 109	.156
What percent of sex offenders are female	1.869	2 107	.159
What percent of sex offenders are juveniles*	1.329	2 108	.269
What percent of sex offenders are children under the age of 12	2.299	2 107	.105

\* Indicates significance at the .05 level

### Summary

This chapter discussed the data that was gathered from the surveys; detailed information was presented in tables. The demographics of the participants were provided along with key variables. The findings of the t-tests, ANOVA, and Chi Square analyses were presented.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

In this chapter, a discussion of the significant results and key findings of the study will be explored. The limitations of the study will be discussed, as well as recommendations for social work practice, policy, and research. A brief conclusion of the study will be presented at the end of this chapter.

#### Discussion

This study was aimed at understanding social work students' perceptions of sex offenders since it is anticipated that they will work with the sex offender population at some point in their careers. Considering the likelihood that social workers will work with this population at some point in their careers, it was essential for the following questions to be explored: What are social work students' perceptions towards sex offenders? Do social work students perceive themselves as being ready to work with sex offenders? Are social work students receiving enough training to work with sex offenders? In addition, it was hypothesized that students in the School of Social Work program have negative attitudes towards the sex offender population. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that social work students are not prepared to work with this population.

The findings of this study suggest that there were no significant difference between participants' gender regarding their perceptions of sex offenders; however, difference between genders did exist in their perceptions toward male sex offender's committing another sexual offense. For example, male participants estimated less than female participants that male sex offenders will commit another sexual offense. This finding was supported by a study conducted in 2013 by Dayanne Harvey. According to Harvey's findings, men are more likely than women to believe that sex offenders are capable of rehabilitation. Furthermore, Harvey (2013) found that men are more likely to believe that sex offenders are able to abstain from committing another sexual offense. In addition, women estimated higher than men that female sex offenders will commit another sexual offense. This compares to a previous study conducted in 2010 by the U.S. Department of Justice through the Center of Sex Offender Management. This study found that women were more likely than men to believe that a greater number of sex offenders will reoffend. Both male and female participants were evenly divided as to whether a juvenile sex offender under the age of 18 will commit another sexual crime. The findings of this study found that participants believe juvenile sex offenders under the age of 18 will commit another sexual offense. These findings were correct because according to the National Sex Offender Public Website (NSOPW), it is estimated that an approximate 10% of juvenile sex offenders will reoffend.

Overall, social work students' perceptions are that there are more male sex offenders than female and juvenile sex offenders.

The findings of this study further suggest that 54.4% of social work students perceive themselves as being comfortable working with male sex offenders. In addition, 64.9% of social work students perceive themselves as being comfortable working with female sex offenders. About 70% of social work students believe they are comfortable working with a juvenile sex offender. The differences in social work students' comfort level based on age or developmental level of the perpetrator may be due to the way sex offenders are portrayed in the media. For example, Galest et al. (2012) argued that the way sex offenders are portrayed in the media can sometimes result in the development of certain myths that are contrary to the data supported by research. Furthermore, the media presents the public with an increasingly distorted view of sex offenders that shape the attitudes of the public, which may explain why social work students perceive themselves as more comfortable working with juvenile sex offenders over adult sex offenders.

Interestingly, participants with children estimated that there are more male sex offenders than female sex offenders. This is a correct perception because as previously stated, adults account for about 80% of arrests and males account for approximately 95% of arrests for sex crimes in the United States (What you need to know about sex offenders, 2014). In addition, social work students who have children perceive that all adult sex offenders and

juvenile sex offenders under the age of 18 were sexually abused as children. This is also a correct perception because according to the NSOPW, it is estimated that one in every five girls and one in every seven boys are sexually abused by the time they reach adulthood (What you need to know about sex offenders, 2014). Social work students who have children also believe that sex crimes are committed by strangers and not family members. This finding was contrary to that of research done by the U. S. Department of Justice. For example, it is estimated that 60% of perpetrators of sex crimes know their victims but are not family members', whereas about 30% of perpetrators are family members and about 10% are strangers (What you need to know about sex offenders, 2014).

### Limitations

There were numerous limitations of the study design and procedures that had an impact on the study. One main limitation of the study was that participants were a sample of convenience which was obtained due to the fact that the researchers are currently social work students. This was a limitation because it was projected that 200 participants would be ideal for this study; however, only 143 social work students participated in the study. Of those 143 students, only 108 completed the questionnaire instrument; giving the study a total of 108 valid surveys that were used for data analysis. Furthermore, because 85% of the sample consisted of females, male perceptions' were underrepresented in this study.

A second limitation to the study was the possible issue of social work students' apprehension because of the overall subject of the study. This may be explained in part by current research that indicates that the term "sex offender" tends to produce strong emotions. Furthermore, research indicates that simply hearing the term makes people uncomfortable and unwilling to discuss the subject due to their own personal beliefs about sex offenders. Because of students' own personal beliefs, participants' responses could have been affected, essentially, affecting the overall study.

A final limitation in the study was that data were collected using a self-administered online survey questionnaire via the Qualtrics website. This was a limitation because students internet connection could have failed, resulting in incomplete surveys. Furthermore, because the survey instrument was distributed to students as a hyperlink via email, a limitation on the number of participants could have occurred. For example, the hyperlink distributed to students could have failed to work properly depending on the electronic devices of the participants. Furthermore, there could have been the possibility that many students do not check their emails on a regular basis, resulting in a limitation on the number of participants for this study.

#### Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

In terms of working with the sex offender population, it is critical for social workers to work with this overlooked population. As previously stated,

social workers have an ethical responsibility to advocate and provide adequate services to all populations. Moreover, social workers should not practice, condone, or facilitate services with any form of discrimination (NASW Code of Ethics, 2014). In regards to future research, Lancaster (1997) argued that further research on sex offenders would strengthen social work students' skills since students are more likely to learn new skills from a challenging population such as sex offenders. Furthermore, conducting further research on this topic may help the social work practice by helping social workers become aware of their own biases when providing treatment to sex offenders.

Grady and Abramson (2011) argued that "not all sex offenders are the same; they commit different acts, offend against different populations, and impose different degrees of violence" (p. 441). In terms of policy, it is recommended that the legal labels for those who commit violent sex crimes should be differentiated from non-violent sex crimes. In addition, it is recommended that policy within the School of Social Work should be changed in order to incorporate a class in their curriculum that will prepare students to work with this population. Young and LoMonaco (2001) found that social work programs should provide students with the tools needed to work with the sex offender population, especially given the increasing likelihood that new practitioners will at some point be required to work with sex offenders, offenders' families, or the survivors of sexual offenses. In addition, research has found that social work students bring about their own myths about sex

offenders and tend to transfer their own biases and beliefs onto others, essentially, affecting the overall treatment of sex offenders. Because of this, it is important the School of Social Work considers exploring this topic further.

The findings of this study suggest that further research is needed in order to explore the differences between students in the social work, psychology, and criminal justice department and their perceptions towards sex offenders. It is possible that students in the psychology and criminal justice department may have fewer biases toward sex offenders than social work students. This study also suggests that further research is needed in order to explore social work practitioners' perceptions of sex offenders since, as previously mentioned, there is a likelihood that social workers will work with this population at some point in their careers. Lea, Auburn, and Kibblewhite (1999) argued that attitudes of professionals' towards clients affect the quality of treatment they provide. Due to the fact that professionals' perceptions affect the quality of treatment provided, it is important that further research is conducted in order to explore the attitudes towards sex offenders from those who work with them.

### Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore social work students' perceptions of sex offenders since it is anticipated that they will work with the sex offender population at some point in their careers. There is limited research on the attitudes of social work students towards sex offenders; this

study begins to open that gateway. A greater understanding of social work students' perceptions will help prepare students to work with the sex offender population, as well as it will help students feel more comfortable and increase service delivery to the sex offender population.

APPENDIX A  
QUESTIONNAIRE

DEMOGRAPHICS:

**What is your gender?**

- Male
- Female

**What best describes your race? (Select all that apply)**

- White
- Black
- Hispanic
- Asian
- Other (please specify)

**Which of the following is your news source? (Select all that apply)**

- Television
- Radio
- Newspaper
- Internet Source
- Peer interaction
- Other (please Specify)

**Do you have any children?**

- Yes
- No

**What social work degree program are you currently enrolled in?**

- BASW
- MSW

**Are you currently a full-time, part-time, or pathway distance education student?**

- Full-Time
- Part-Time
- Pathway Distance Education Program

**What program are you currently enrolled in?**

- CalSWEC, Title IV-E (Child Welfare) Stipend Program

- Mental Health Stipend Program
- General

For the following questions, please type the answer you feel is most appropriate. Please be advised you will not be able to proceed to the next question until you answer the question you are currently on. **Select the NEXT button to continue.**

From a scale between 0-100, what percent of male sex offenders commit another sexual offense?

From a scale between 0-100, what percent of female sex offenders commit another sexual offense?

From a scale between 0-100, what percent of sex offenders who are under 18 commit another sexual offense?

From a scale between 0-100, what percent of male rapists sexually reoffend?

From a scale between 0-100, what percent of female rapists sexually reoffend?

From a scale between 0-100, what percent of rapists who are under 18 sexually reoffend?

From a scale between 0-100, what percent of male child molesters sexually reoffend?

From a scale between 0-100, what percent of female child molesters sexually reoffend?

From a scale between 0-100, what percent of juvenile child molesters sexually reoffend?

From a scale between 0-100, what percent of adult sex offenders were sexually abused as children?

From a scale between 0-100, what percent of juvenile sex offenders (who are under 18) were sexually abused as children?

From a scale between 0-100, what percent of male sex offenders are mentally ill?

From a scale between 0-100, what percent of female sex offenders are mentally ill?

From a scale between 0-100, what percent of juvenile sex offenders (who are under 18) are mentally ill?

From a scale between 0-100, what percent of male sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities?

From a scale between 0-100, what percent of female sex offenders are brought to the attention of authorities?

From a scale between 0-100, what percent of juvenile sex offenders (who are under 18) are brought to the attention of authorities?

From a scale between 0-100, what percent of sex crimes are committed by strangers?

From a scale between 0-100, what percent of sex crimes are committed by a family member?

From a scale between 0-100, what percent of sex offenders are males?

From a scale between 0-100, what percent of sex offenders are females?

From a scale between 0-100, what percent of sex offenders are juveniles (under the age of 18)?

From a scale between 0-100, what percent of sex offenders are children under the age of 12?

**A child under the age of 12 can be a sex offender?**

Yes

No

**A juvenile who commits a sexual crime against other children should have to register as a sex offender?**

Yes

No

At what age should a juvenile who commits a sexual crime against other children have to register as a sex offender?

**A juvenile who commits a sexual crime against an adult should have to register as a sex offender?**

Yes

No

At what age should a juvenile who commits a sexual crime against an adult have to register as a sex offender?

**Who commits the most sexual crimes?**

Males

Females

Juveniles (under the age of 18)

**Are you comfortable working with a male sex offender?**

Yes

No

**Are you comfortable working with a female sex offender?**

Yes

No

**Are you comfortable working with a juvenile sex offender?**

Yes

No

For the following True or False questions, please select the answer you feel is correct. Please be advised you will not be able to proceed to the next question until you answer the question you are currently on. **Select the NEXT button to continue.**

**Treatment is not effective for male sex offenders**

- True
- False

**Treatment is not effective for female sex offenders**

- True
- False

**Treatment is not effective for juvenile sex offenders**

- True
- False

**The majority of male sex offenders are caught by the authorities, convicted, then placed in prison**

- True
- False

**The majority of female sex offenders are caught by the authorities, convicted, then placed in prison**

- True
- False

**The majority of juvenile sex offenders are caught by the authorities, convicted, then placed in prison**

- True
- False

**Most sexual assaults are committed by strangers**

- True
- False

**Most sexual assaults are committed by a family member**

- True
- False

**Male sex offenders reoffend at a higher rate than female sex offenders**

- True
- False

**Male sex offenders reoffend at a higher rate than juvenile sex offenders**

- True
- False

**Female sex offenders reoffend at a higher rate than male sex offenders**

- True
- False

**Female sex offenders reoffend at a higher rate than juvenile sex offenders**

- True
- False

For the following statements, please select whether you strongly disagree, disagree, agree, or strongly agree. Please be advised you will not be able to proceed until you answer each statement. **Select the NEXT button to complete the survey.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Residency restrictions should be imposed on all reentering sex offenders, even if it means they are unable to return home due to close proximity of a school, playground, or park.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Sex offenders should be prepared to endure threats and harassment from their neighbors once they have been found out due to the sex offender registry.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Experiencing shame and embarrassment due to the sex offender registry is a consequence sex offenders should learn to accept.



Juvenile sex offenders should be treated like adult sex offenders.



Duncan, J. (2012). *Public perceptions regarding sex offenders and sex offender management* (Unpublished master's thesis, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee).

APPENDIX B  
INFORMED CONSENT



College of Social and Behavioral Sciences  
School of Social Work

#### INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate in is designated to explore social work students' perceptions of sex offenders. This is a graduate research project conducted by Mayra Bernal and Henry Meza, under the supervision of Dr. Herbert Shon, Assistant Professor at the California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the School of Social Work's Sub-Committee of the California State University, San Bernardino Institutional Review Board.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this research study is to explore social work students' perceptions of sex offenders since it is anticipated that they will work with the sex offender population at some point in their careers. Further, studying social work students' perceptions of sex offenders is needed because personal attitudes are likely to influence treatment, resulting in the needs of sex offenders being ignored.

**DESCRIPTION:** You were selected to participate in this study because you are currently enrolled as a social work student. In this study you will be asked to complete survey questions about your perceptions and attitudes towards the sex offender population.

**PARTICIPATION:** This survey is completely anonymous and any information that is obtained within this study will remain confidential. Furthermore, this study will not ask for any personal information. If you decide to no longer participate, you can withdraw or discontinue your participation from this study at anytime without any consequences.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** Please note that the research is anonymous. Confidentiality records identifying the subject will be maintained through password protected files on the researchers' USB drive. The USB drive will be kept in a password protected safe box.

**DURATION:** If you decide to participate in this study, you will be given a 50 question survey. The survey should take no more than 20 minutes to complete.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:** Although there are no foreseeable risks associated with this study, participating in this study may bring about uncomfortable reactions due to the nature of the topic. Participating in this study does not provide any direct benefits to individual participants other than provide insight on social work students' perceptions of sex offenders.

**CONTACT:** If you have any questions about this survey, you can contact Dr. Herbert Shon at (909) 537-5532 or hshon@csusb.edu.

**RESULTS:** Results of the study can be obtained by contacting Dr. Herbert Shon at the number or email address listed above.

**CONFIRMATION STATEMENT:** This is to certify that I read and understand the information above, and decide to participate in this study.

**ONLINE AGREEMENT BY SELECTING THE 'I AGREE' OPTION ON THE WEBPAGE INDICATES CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.**

909.537.5501

5500 UNIVERSITY PARKWAY, SAN BERNARDINO, CA 92407-2393

The California State University • Bakersfield • Channel Islands • Chico • Dominguez Hills • East Bay • Fresno • Fullerton • Humboldt • Long Beach • Los Angeles  
Maritime Academy • Monterey Bay • Northridge • Pomona • Sacramento • San Bernardino • San Diego • San Francisco • San Jose • San Luis Obispo • San Marcos • Sonoma • Stanislaus

APPENDIX C  
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

## Debriefing Statement

The survey you have just completed was designed to determine social work students' perceptions of the sex offender population. If you are interested in the results of this study, you can obtain a copy of the results at California State University, San Bernardino's Pfau library or on their website at <http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/> once the study has been completed, August 2015. We ask that you not discuss this survey with anyone you may know participating in this study.

If you have any question, comments, or concerns due to participating in this study, please contact Dr. Herbert Shon at (909) 537-5532 or [hshon@csusb.edu](mailto:hshon@csusb.edu).

We would like to thank you for your time and participation for completing this survey!

APPENDIX D  
RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear Social Work Student:

Our names are Henry Meza and Mayra Bernal. We are conducting research in order to complete our thesis for our MSW. Below you will find a link to a survey we are administering for our thesis project. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are currently a social work student and it is anticipated that you will work with the sex offender population at some point in your career. We would appreciate your participation in this project because your answers will help us explore social work students' perceptions of sex offenders.

We are not asking you for any personal identifying information in order to protect your confidentiality. This study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from this study at any time. In order to accurately explore social work students' perceptions of sex offenders, your honest responses are of great importance.

Should you choose to participate in this study, please click on the following link [https://qtrial2014az1.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_9nvEkWoCsH5BJUV](https://qtrial2014az1.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_9nvEkWoCsH5BJUV). Once you click on the link you will be directed to the informed consent page explaining the purpose and nature of this study. The survey is 50 questions long and should take no more than 20 minutes to complete.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,  
Henry Meza and Mayra Bernal

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## ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

This was a two-person project where authors collaborated throughout. However, for each phase of the project, certain authors took primary responsibility. These responsibilities were assigned in the manner listed below.

1. Data Collection:

Team Effort: Mayra Bernal and Henry Christopher Meza

2. Data Entry and Analysis:

Team Effort: Mayra Bernal and Henry Christopher Meza

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:

- a. Introduction and Literature

Assigned Leader: Mayra Bernal

- b. Methods

Assigned Leader: Henry Christopher Meza

- c. Results

Team Effort: Mayra Bernal and Henry Christopher Meza

- d. Discussion

Assigned Leader: Mayra Bernal